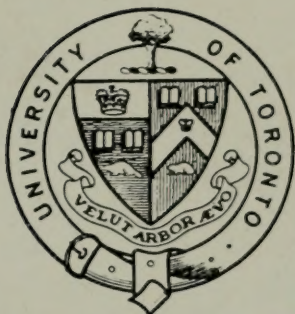


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PETROL PATROLS



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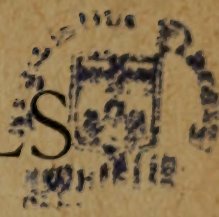
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BY

JOHN S. MARGERISON

*G.B.
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AUTHOR OF

"ACTION!" "THE SEA SERVICES," ETC.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

1918



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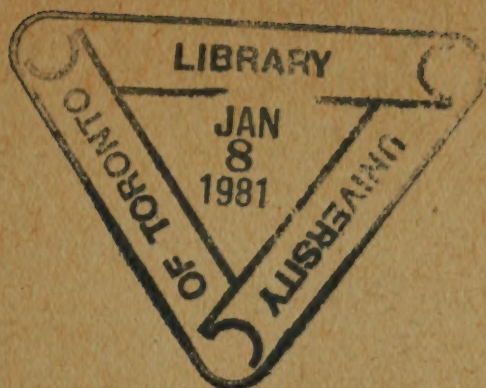
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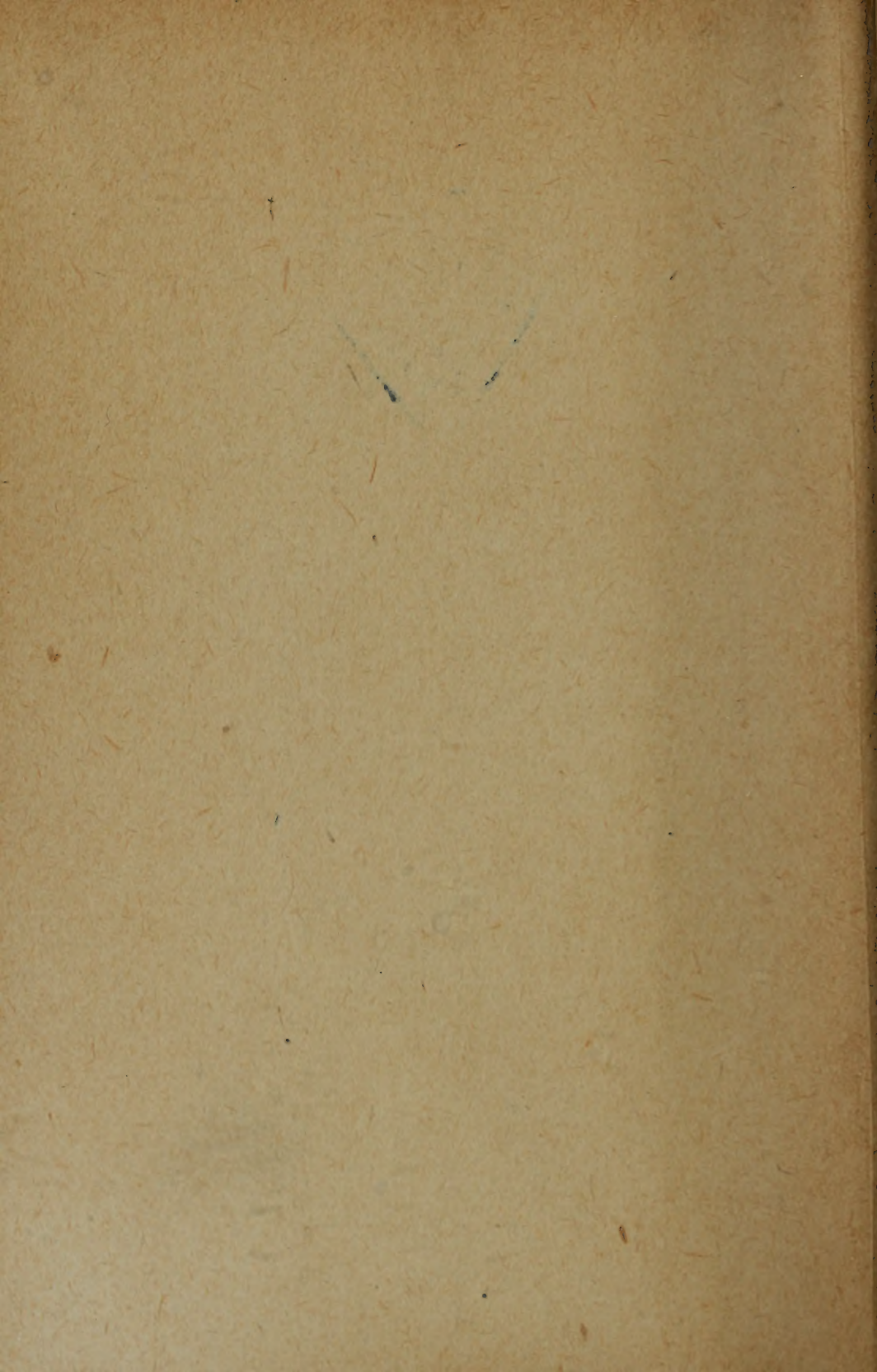
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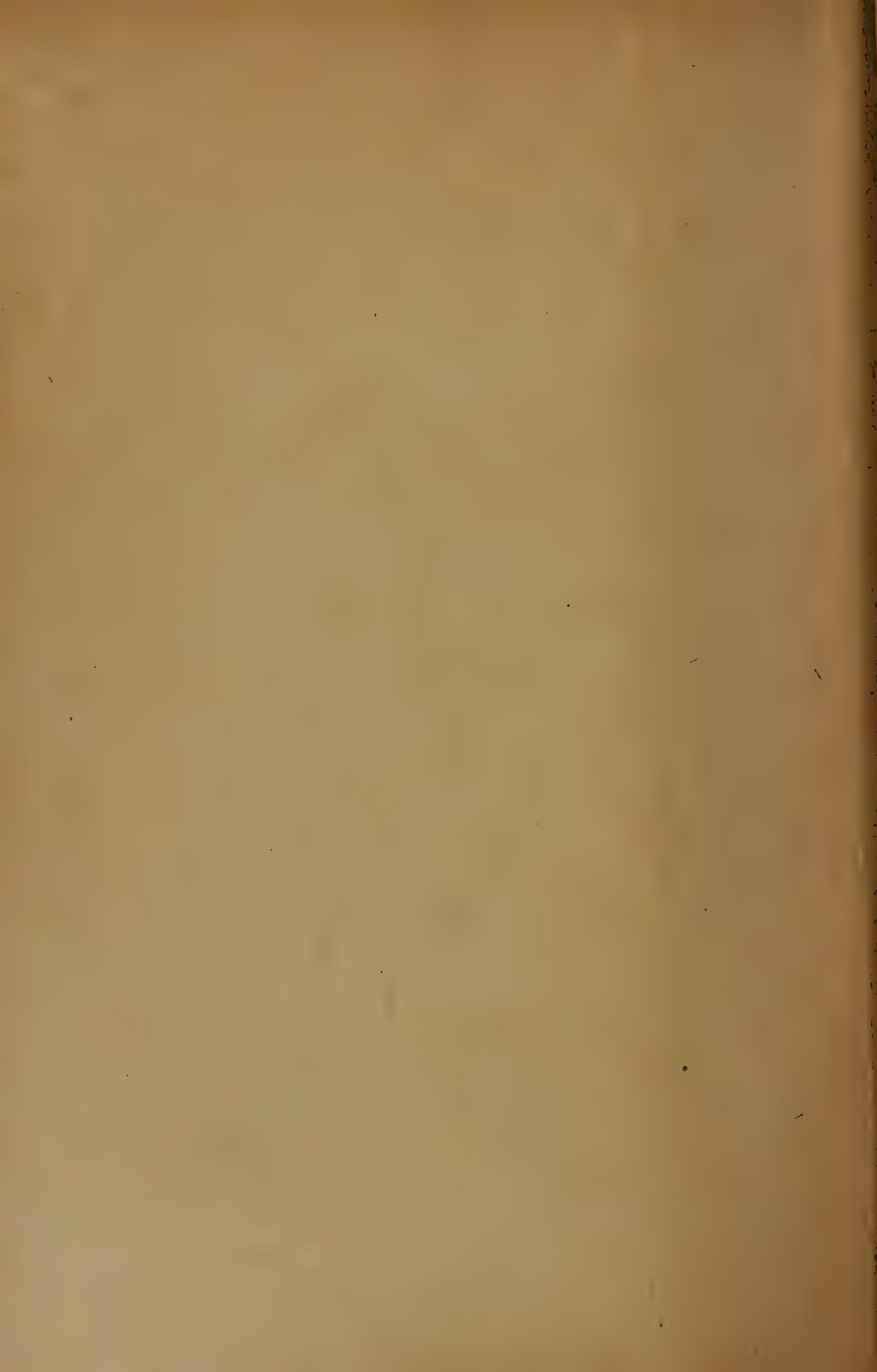


To those "Roderick Frazers" who, being sportsmen and patriots, came to help the Navy in its defence of "those who pass upon the seas on their lawful occasions," and to be useful units of "that Fleet upon which, under the good Providence of God, the safety, honour and integrity of our Empire so mainly depends," this book is inscribed.

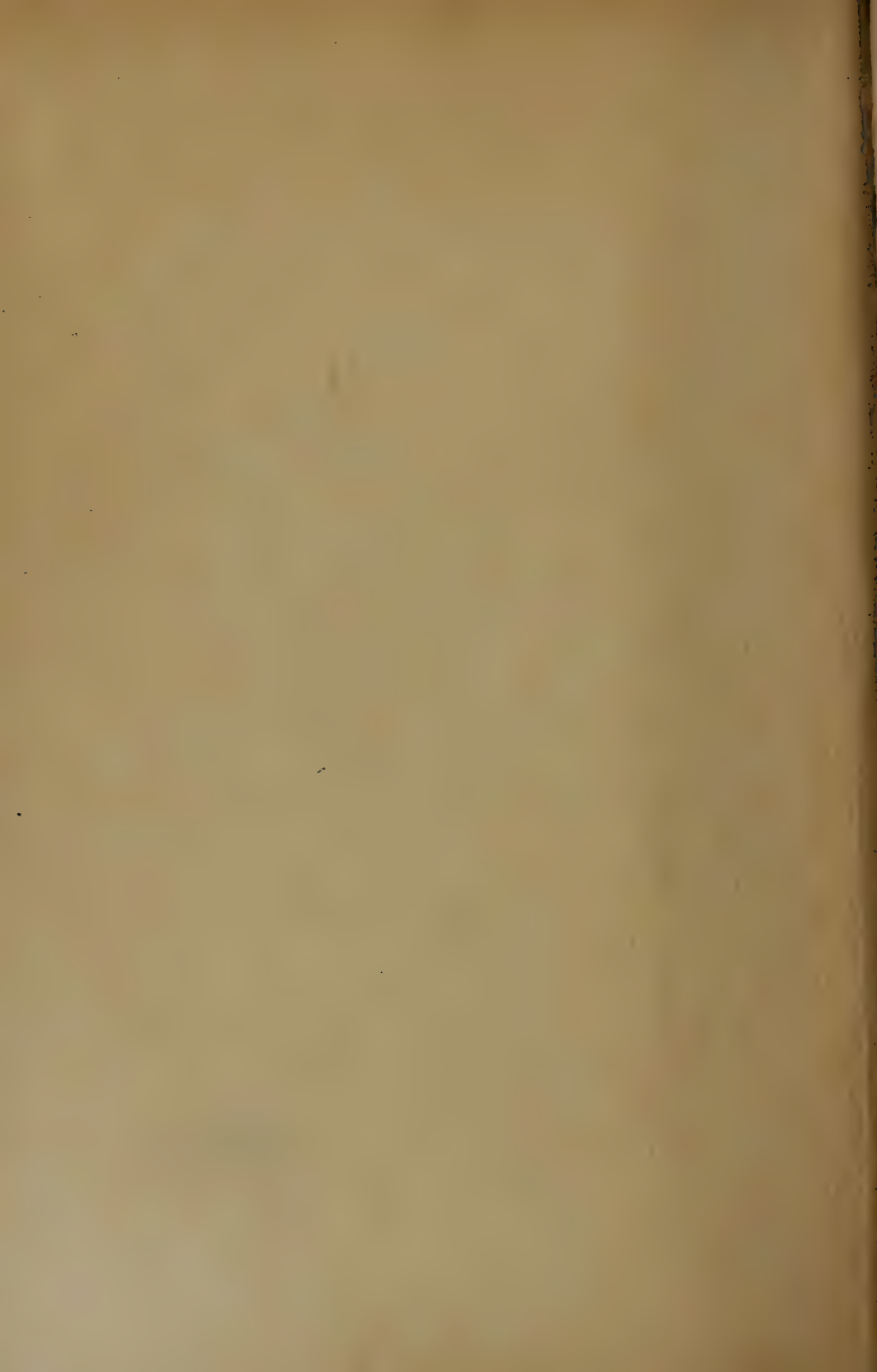


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“ SPECIAL SERVICE ”



" SPECIAL SERVICE "

I

" SPECIAL SERVICE "

HAD he been born eighty years ago Roderick Frazer would have been a Corinthian, and have found the adventure for which his soul craved in tooling along a dusty highway in a chaise and four ; or financing—and, maybe, taking part in—those fistic contests of the old-time prize ring. However, as he first saw the light of day in the year of Queen Victoria's Jubilee, and did not find adventure until he had attained years of more or less discretion, he eventually discovered his twin soul in the motor-car.

Roderick was a bright young fellow, and had circumstances compelled him to work for his daily bread and butter, would have risen to supreme command of any motor shop in rather less than no time. His ear was one of those uncanny microphones which could in an instant detect defects from the sound of a running engine ; he could tell you whether the timing chain was a little slack or whether the carburettor was merely

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choked. And, what was more, he took just as great delight in stripping down the mechanism and adjusting that timing chain or clearing that carburettor as he did in going "all out" along a particularly inviting piece of highway, and with it all he possessed the sympathy of touch and the sub-conscious knowledge of the right thing to do in an instantaneous emergency, which are the gifts alone of the born motorist.

As was only to be expected, when marine motoring began to attract the interest of the more adventurous youth on this side the Atlantic, Roderick plunged into the aquatic sport with all the fervour of an enthusiast, and rapidly became super-efficient in the handling of racing hydroplanes and all their kindred craft.

Fortunate as regards financial resources, he was able to put the manifold ideas which came to him from time to time into practical shape, and the result of his many improvements on his own racing boat was that he began to carry off, at the periodical regattas for petrol driven craft, more pots, shields and trophies than he could find room for on his sideboard; more pennants than the halliards on his boat's small mast could accommodate at one time.

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Then came war.

" I'm going into this," said Frazer. " I've got an idea that the Navy will be able to use me and my boat *Chi-Chi*; surely there's some way in which my peculiar knowledge of marine motoring can be utilised in the national service. Besides, look at the sport there'll be on the water—racing will be tame in comparison."

Accordingly, he made certain representations to the Powers That Are—and the results of those representations were many and varied. The first were a commission as a Temporary Lieutenant in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve for himself and a diminutive White Ensign for *Chi-Chi*. Then came a tiny three-pounder semi-automatic gun and a few boxes of ammunition. This weapon he mounted on the half-deck of his craft forward, and balanced the effect by erecting a brass-jacketed, efficient-looking Maxim aft between the well and the stern post. A miniature but powerful searchlight and a tiny eleven-pound wireless installation completed *Chi-Chi's* outfit, and, later, a few tins of high explosive with percussion detonators ready for fitting were added for certain specific purposes. A pukka Navy petty officer—incidentally a crack shot with a three-pounder—

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came as his second in command, and four men who had attended the racing hydroplane in more peaceful times became able seamen in the Volunteer Reserve "for the duration"—and for the love of the thing.

Thus equipped, *Chi-Chi* put out one grey morning for a certain spot on the East Coast "for disposal." Temporary Lieutenant Frazer wondered largely what "disposal" meant; an unsentimental commodore informed him that, initially, it meant acting as tender to a certain ship, who, in her turn, was a "mother" for submarines. The boat which had once made hay of all competition by reason of her speed, now found that speed and the handiness with which she could be manœuvred of exceeding value in taking mails to certain grateful submarines, and in bringing back the manifold letters they had found time to write. Then, when the mother ship required fresh provisions it was the racing motor boat who fetched them. This was all very well for a time; then her commander began to grumble.

"I joined to fight," said Roderick. "Not to be an errand boy."

"Your services can be best utilised, *at present*,

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in the work you are doing," replied Authority. The young lieutenant bowed to the mandate, and gleaned an infinitesimal amount of hope from that " at present."

November came—the November of that first terrible winter—and the motor boat got a change in her work. She was detached to run messages between two great battle fleets, both of whom, in certain convenient harbours, awaited alike the coming of the German Fleet and " Der Tag." Frazer made some friends among the regular officers, it is true, and this went a long way to compensate him for those dreary days and nights when the motor boat slashed through grey, icy seas ; when the pitiless rain and sleet came down in sheets, drenching through everything ; when oilskins chafed great calluses on wrists and throat ; when life became almost unbearable.

Indeed, I think it would have become utterly so but for one little episode which came to break the monotony during the end of that winter. It was one of Von Tirpitz' submarines—sent out in that long-dead initial " iron blockade"—which provided it by engaging a herring boat, whose chief duty at the moment was the fishing up of mines. The herring boat had nothing but rifles

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for armament ; the submarine was making great play with a six-pounder, and rapidly reducing the fisherman's upper works to matchwood and splinters, when *Chi-Chi* came silently and swiftly on the scene.

An overshot round from her three-pounder was the first sign of her presence, and the submarine turned to deal with this new and even more puny antagonist before finishing off his first opponent. But before he could get time to train his gun properly, *Chi-Chi* was literally at his throat.

With the audacity which had carried him through many a forlorn hope in racing days, Roderick let her rip, bows dead on to the submarine, while Petty Officer Collins, at the three-pounder in the sea-washed bows, put in double tides. Right close in to almost point-blank range, presenting a small and hard-to-hit target to the submarine, the little craft sped, and then, after a lateral spraying of tiny three-pounder shells—each of which did its part in the manufacture of a neat openwork pattern in the submarine's hull—she turned and fled, leaving the U-boat to go down faster and farther than its designers had ever calculated upon.

“ Now that's something like service,” com-

“ SPECIAL SERVICE ”

mented Roderick. “ Nothing like a bit of a scrap to encourage one in this everlasting errand boy job.”

But Authority sat up and took notice when he made his modest report ; when it was compared with that sent in by the herring boat Authority decided that *Chi-Chi* could be better employed. So they appointed her to “ detached service ”—which means exactly service as requisite or at her commander’s discretion. The gallant half-dozen began to enjoy themselves. *Chi-Chi* cropped up in all sorts of places. Lonely trawlers, punching up and down their ten-mile beats on the edge of their snared grounds, smelt her occasionally, and were grateful in their own dour fashion for the news she brought. Drifters, garnering enemy mines in the home waters, told her of suspicious happenings, which she immediately went to investigate. It was on one such occasion that she found a submarine in difficulties ; a submarine who laughed at her insistent demand for immediate surrender, but who soon changed his tune when the Maxim swept every man from his whaleback and Frazer’s ready automatic made good practice on every head that showed above his conning-tower top. And, just to make sure,

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the three-pounder made a colander of the conning-tower, so that the U-boat had the option of diving and filling—thus drowning all hands—or surrendering unconditionally. It took him an hour to make up his mind to do this last, and for that space of time the tiny cockleshell motor boat danced around him, ready and eager to deal with any and every emergency.

It was a great triumph for the gallant six when a tug came and took that submarine in tow, and later on Frazer had the pleasure of seeing him, under a different ensign, performing most efficient service with a British flotilla.

Rusty tramps, nosing their canny way up Channel, met Frazer occasionally, and were grateful for the lead which he gave them through the minefield paths; passengers on gigantic ocean liners speculated idly whether his tiny boat would sink and fill before she had piloted them to a safe anchorage, but all admired the grit and devotion to duty shown by this erstwhile racing man.

Flanders called next—called insistently—and, lo and behold, *Chi-Chi* blossomed into a full-sized canal monitor, and by the way her crew talked you'd have fancied she was capable of beating the

" SPECIAL SERVICE "

High Seas Fleet singlehanded. She one day engaged in a long range duel with a field battery, and put two of its guns out of action, and that same evening she put a termination to the career of an enemy supply train, to say nothing of destroying a couple of motor lorries in a convoy. An inquisitive Fokker who swept low in the sky the better to see what the little spitfire might be received a dose of lead from the Maxim which transported its pilot to hotter regions, and the 'plane nose-dived into the canal, and was later retrieved as a spoil of war.

Then appeared defects ; the rack and strain of the first year of warfare began to tell on motors and hull ; spare parts ran short—a visit to a dockyard became imperative.

So, for a full month, these half-dozen silent, bronzed, salt-stained men of the sea " enjoyed the blessings of the land and the fruits of their labours." For a full year they had dreamed of a bed that didn't kick and leap with every wave-motion ; of a freshly-cooked meal that didn't come out of a can ; of clean, white sheets instead of soaked sleeping bags ; of Turkish baths and stalls at the " best thing in town." Realisation came too swiftly ; once these things had been

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sampled there was re-born in their blood the sea restlessness and, a full week before their time, they were back in that dockyard, trying to hustle workers here, lending a hand there, with the result that the motor boat put to sea three clear days to the good. She had achieved the impossible ; she had hurried the dockyard !

“ Why do we want to get back ? ” echoed Roderick, when they asked the reason for his energetic pushfulness. “ Well, I don’t know. It’s a rotten life ; look at these hands—they used to be soft and white ; now a coal-miner would be disgusted by their horniness. Look at this chafe on my neck ; that comes of wearing a sodden oilskin when the spray comes over the bows in bucketfuls ; we usually wear dry clothes for just so long as it takes the sea to soak through a change of raiment, and as a rule when at sea we have to bale like demons to keep the dear old hooker from filling and foundering. But, man alive ! we like it—like it even better than those fair days when we sliced through the roads at Cowes for silver cups and shields and trophies and bits of coloured bunting half the world would give their ears to sport ; like it better than all the games we ever knew—war’s the greatest game of all ! ”

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" Your boat only draws a few feet of water," said Authority, once more waking up to *Chi-Chi's* existence. " Go over to the Belgian coast and see what you can find there in the way of unterseeboten ; also, if you should happen to see an occasional enemy mine—well, you know how to deal with it."

Chi-Chi said, " Thank you," very nicely—and disappeared once more. The Pack Who Hunt the Unterseeboote gave her enthusiastic welcome ; their commodore presented her with a station and a few intricate devices for bringing home her quarry. Also, so that her crew should not be bored in the intervals between " meets," she was provided with one of those jolly little one-boat drags whereby enemy mines can be fished up from the depths and the gunlayer be allowed good practice in sinking them—from a safe distance.

Once there came a submarine who broke surface after he had seen the motor boat, and whose big four-inch gun talked most rudely to the smaller craft. The motor boat spat back and ran ; ran with the submarine lumbering after her ; throttling down her motors so as to keep just out of range, and all the while drawing that U-boat farther and farther into the meshes of a gigantic

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snare set for the trapping of such as he. And, after the destroyers had closed in and captured the U-boat, it was the little hydroplane who was given the job of escorting him home to a certain place on the East Coast, where the Navy has established a base for dealing with enemy craft who come intact to these shores.

It was rather fortunate that she should get home that day, for eight big Zeppelins tried that same night to demonstrate what "frightfulness" really was, having chosen certain highly important British cities as their objective. But the East Coast defences were ready and waiting for them—and also for the flotilla of submarines they had brought with them for some nefarious purpose or other. So when, just after midnight, our motor boat became embroiled with two enemy submarines, who would insist upon rising, firing, and then suddenly dipping, Frazer suddenly bethought himself of a new scheme he had worked out a few days ago—a scheme in which the jolly little one-boat drag and the tins of high explosive with percussion detonators played a big part. He put the scheme into effect, and it worked. I can't tell you what it is—the Censor won't let me—but the enemy lost five submarines in that

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enterprise, three of which the young bright lieutenant claimed, and the Admiralty have since improved upon and adopted his device in the eternal submarine hunt. The inventor refused to add a few letters to his name as a reward.

" D.S.C. be hanged," he said, when they mooted the subject. " If there'd have been no war there'd have been no invention. I don't want bally rewards for playing the game."

At other times attached seaplanes would tell *Chi-Chi* that enemy submarines lurked in her vicinity. Then, by means of her own, the motor boat would locate them. She became a shadow ; where the unterseeboten went she followed, and she had a nice way of tenaciously sticking to their tails till they came up to breathe, when—on the principle of hitting first and asking questions afterwards—she would present them with a grand collection of three-pounder shells, most of which found their billets, and raised joy in Admiralty hearts when her reports were sent in.

But, notwithstanding the marked success which has attended his strenuous efforts, notwithstanding the thanks and gratitude a good-natured Navy pours upon him and his fellow motor boaters, the young lieutenant has never got rid of that

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tremendous feeling of awe engendered by the work of the grand fleets around him ; has never quite lived down that unconscious pride in the useful and important jobs the Motor Boat Patrol are called upon to do.

“ The end ? ” he queried, when once asked a certain question. “ The end’s inevitable—it’s just got to be the end of war for ever and ever. The future’s as bright and rosy to-day as it ever was ; Fritz is nearly sitting up and wagging his tail like a begging dog. Rewards ? ”

He broke off and pointed to a small photograph on the wall of his room ashore. It showed a battered submarine in tow of a tug who had once been a pleasure steamer, and hoisted above the black-crossed Eagle Ensign was the Meteor Flag of the Sea Empire.

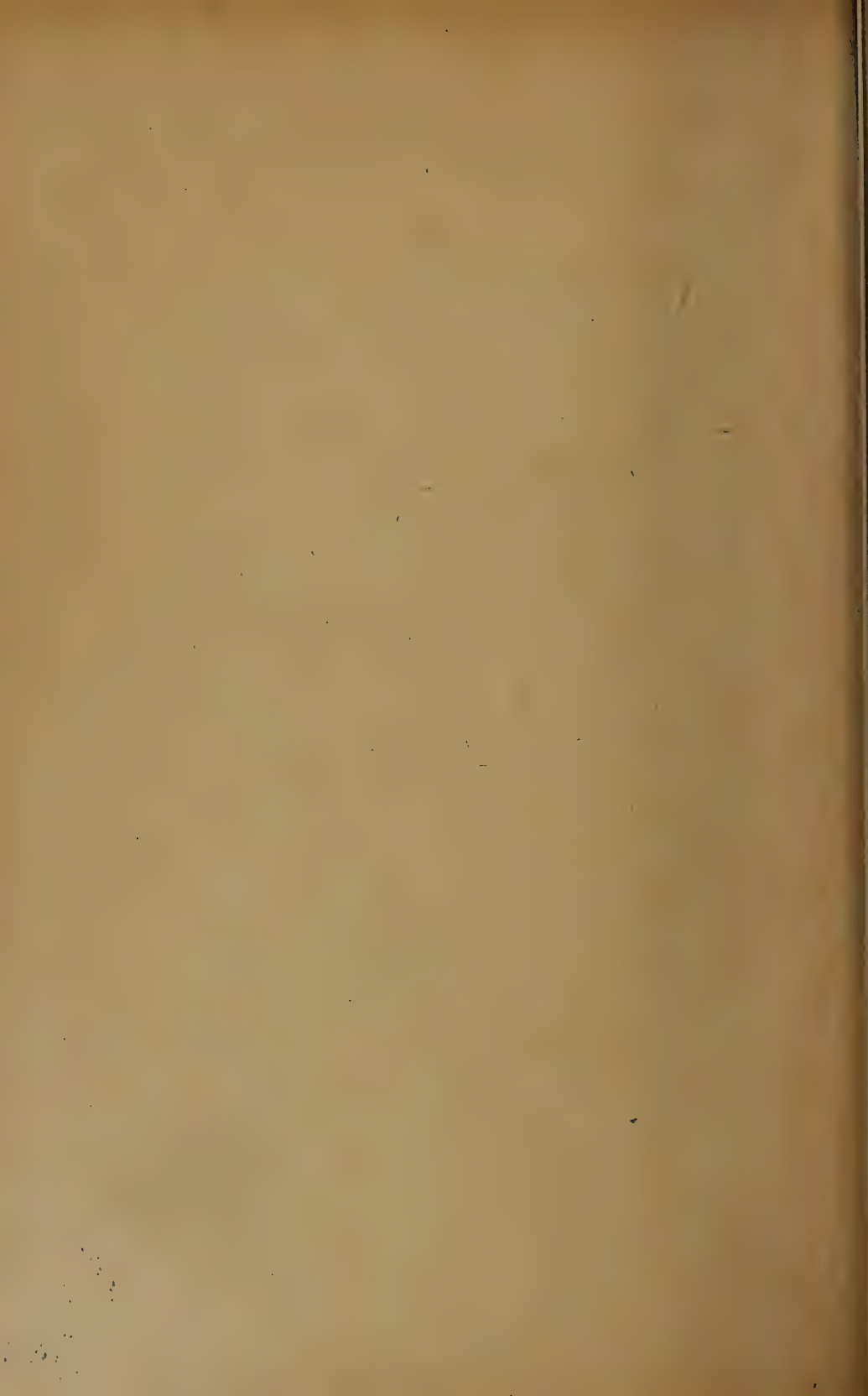
“ Rewards ? ” he repeated. “ Those pots and things there I got in fair and strenuous contest.” His arm swept in a vague gesture the silver-decorated sideboard. “ Look here, my boy, if it came to a choice which of all my trophies I should keep, you could take all the cups and shields and shove ’em in the crucible ; you could rip the pennants up for paper-making—but that photo is the picture of the first submarine I ever

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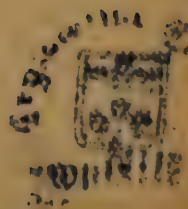
succeeded in capturing—and when my call comes, it shall be buried with me. No, it's not swank—it's just the feeling that war is the greatest game of all ; that the best reward a man can have is to know he did his little bit when his country had need of him.”

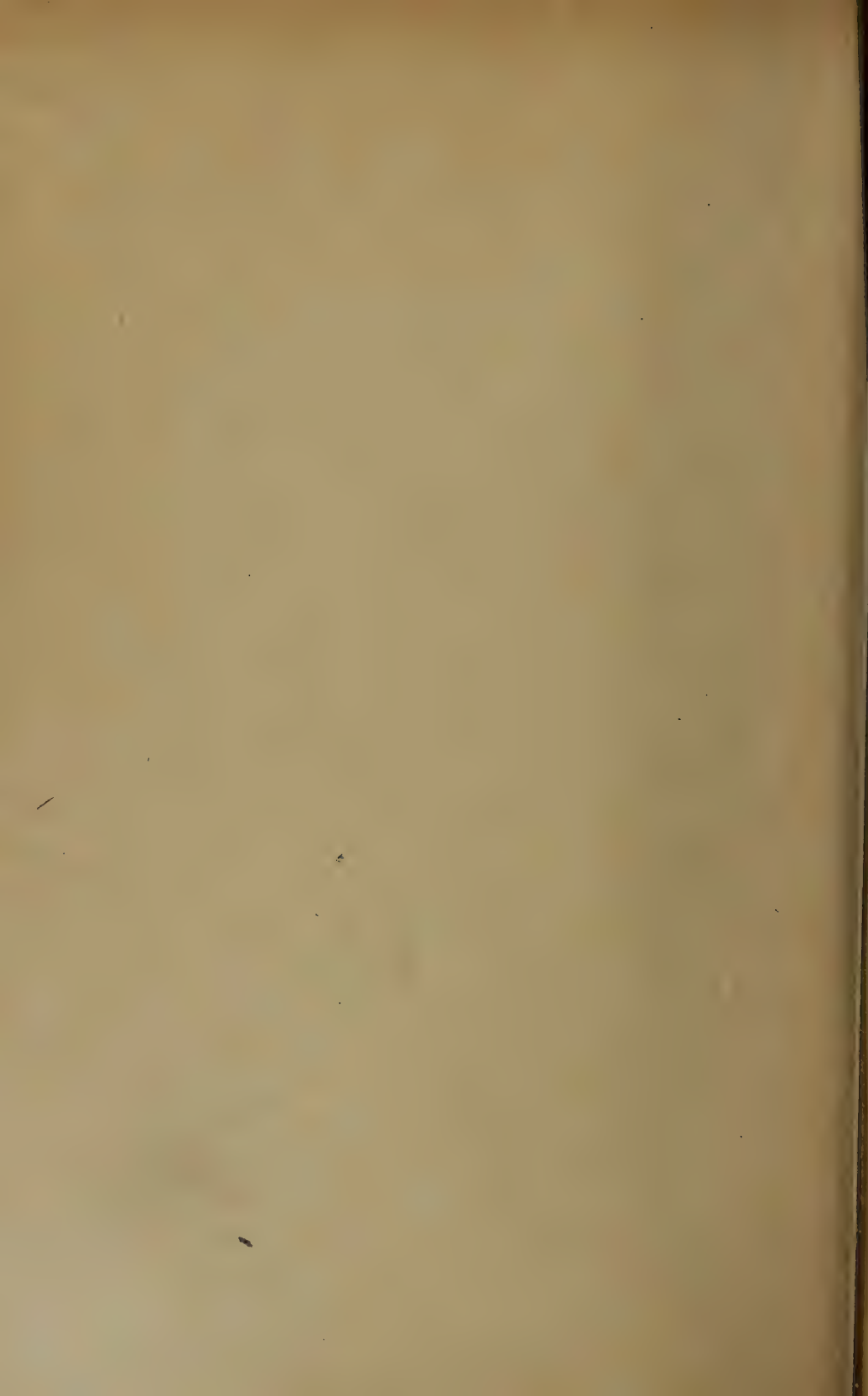
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Also, when his heart was opened, he told me the stories which follow.



GLORY BY PROXY





GLORY BY PROXY

II

GLORY BY PROXY

WHEN Roderick Frazer offered his smart racing motor boat *Chi-Chi* to Those In Authority over the Navy, his mind was filled with dreams of sanguinary combats with enemy submarines, from which *Chi-Chi* always emerged victorious, and as a result of which he—Roderick—invariably added a parti-coloured ribbon to the left breast of his reefer coat and two or three letters after his name. But, alas for human aspiration, Roderick found that his dreams fell far short of fulfilment, and that the work he was detailed to perform held few chances of achieving either glory, honour, decorations, or alphabetical fame. In short, instead of hunting the unterseeboote, *Chi-Chi* was allotted to a certain section of the Grand Fleet as a messenger girl.

True, she was a formidable type of messenger. A lean Vickers semi-automatic three-pounder gun peered over her slim bows like an index finger indicating the path of glory; astern, its

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top-heavy effect was balanced by a brass-jacketed Maxim which guarded the white wake of waters marking the boat's track, while, sharing the none-too-commodious well with her exceedingly powerful engines, was a minute, blank-faced searchlight. Also, cluttering her narrow upper deck, were a pair of regulation, Admiralty-pattern, picket-boat torpedo dropping gears, each holding in leash a fully-charged, explosive-headed, brand-new fourteen-inch torpedo. Moreover, among the five men who helped Captain Roderick Frazer—he was really a temporary lieutenant of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve “appointed for the duration of hostilities”—was a pukka Navy gunlayer, “Jumper” Collins by name, as bad a hat as ever wore the blue collar; a man full of strange oaths and expressions; but a super-expert at the gunsights.

Possessing all these things, therefore, it galled Frazer exceedingly to think that he had to merely run messages between big ships, to carry letters to outlying submarines, and occasionally to transfer to mother ships tons of raw red beef and filthy potatoes as well as incidental ratings sent up from the depots to augment the crews of such ships or vessels of war as happened to be short-handed.

GLORY BY PROXY

"It's all very well to say we're doing our bit," muttered Roderick, as *Chi-Chi* chugged along through the mouth of a certain northern harbour one wintry afternoon, "but it's the type of the 'bit' that annoys me. Here we're armed to the teeth like comic opera brigands, and yet we've never had a chance of firing a round in anger. Oh, I know somebody's got to carry the dispatches, but why on earth can't they give the job to some other boat, and let us have a change once in a while?"

"Jumper" Collins—the naval petty officer and *Chi-Chi's* second in command—grinned sympathetically.

"It is a bit rotten, sir," he ventured. "If we don't use the old popgun soon I'll be getting rusty, and have to apply for a transfer to some hooker where they get a bit of practice occasionally."

"Don't do that, Collins," laughed Frazer, "or I'll certainly die of boredom. Well, it's no use grouching, I suppose; the Umpteenth Battle Squadron will be like lost sheep if we don't deliver the dispatches, I expect, so we'll just have to go on with it and hope for alteration before long. Spin us that yarn about the shark again."

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And so, just to while away the long hours, Collins related, for the fiftieth time, the wholly fictitious account of his adventure with a man-eating shark in the southern seas. He had just arrived at the point where he turned in the water and stabbed the finny enemy with his clasp-knife when Roderick held up his hand for silence.

"That's gunfire, or I'm a Dutchman," said the lieutenant. "Listen."

Chi-Chi's crew of six listened with all their ears; the men who tended the motors stopped them so that there should be no interruption to the low, thudding sounds which could be faintly heard. From being a mendacious court jester, Collins immediately became transformed to the gunnery expert.

"A four-incher, sir," he reported. "And about ten rifles firing independently. By the way I should say it was a submarine strafing something, maybe a Fritz having a yarn with somebody who can't hit back."

"We'll investigate, anyway," said Frazer. "Perhaps it'll prove a chance to use your popgun and earn us some of the kudos we deserve."

Heading towards the distant noise, hidden by the grey atmosphere which made visibility so

GLORY BY PROXY

low, *Chi-Chi* exerted the enormous speed which had won her so many races—which had filled Frazer's rooms with more silver trophies than he quite knew what to do with, and had decorated the boat's halyards with as many winning pennants as they could conveniently carry.

The water leapt to meet *Chi-Chi*; the grey, icy seas swirled over her forecastle in a thin film and percolated into her well, rendering it necessary for a hand to bale to assist the miniature pump to keep her dry. All hands speedily became soaked through to the skin despite their oilskins; those oilskins chafed and opened up the old calluses on hands and necks and wrists, and presently the motion of the frail little vessel became almost unbearable.

Collins jumped to his place on the forecastle and unhoused his weapon, fondling the breech and firing levers almost lovingly. Spitting on a shell, "for luck," he entered it, and stood by to open fire as soon as such an operation might be necessary.

"I hope we're not taking all this trouble for nothing, sir," he yelled. "If it isn't a Fritz I *shall* have a grouse on."

"And so shall I," retorted Frazer, as he loosened the pins of the torpedo dropping gear.

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“ Between us we’ll be able to produce quite a fine comminatory chant.”

Suddenly, through a rift in the shrouding grey rain, Collins caught sight of the vessel from whom the noise of gunfire was emanating. Long, low, whalebacked and rusty, with a black-and-white diapered conning-tower showing above her stream-line, was a submarine, though just then a big-crested wave hid her letter and number from sight. Then, as she rose to the crest of a sea, Collins saw her gun belching forth shell, saw eight or ten of her crew potting with rifles from various points of vantage at a steam drifter, who, her nets down, was employed in peaceful fishing. Also he saw what made him really berserk—a white-painted U 98.

Without orders—he needed none, knowing Frazer—Collins loosed off the three-pounder just as *Chi-Chi* took a sea green over the bows. The U-boat’s crew looked suddenly up to see who this interfering pigmy might be, and at the sight of *Chi-Chi*’s White Ensign, sent up a howl of rage. Then their four-inch swung round and the riflemen turned their attention to picking off *Chi-Chi*’s crew, what time Collins worked double tides at that clamorous three-pounder.

GLORY BY PROXY

Crash! A well-aimed four-inch shell kicked up a gout of spume just ahead of *Chi-Chi* as that little craft turned and sped on at forty knots. Frazer's intention was to steam at extreme speed in a circle around the U-boat, keeping her in range all the time and giving the efficiently-worked three-pounder countless opportunities for the manufacture of a more or less neat open-work pattern in the eggshell hull. But as *Chi-Chi* felt the shock of that explosion her bows swerved and Collins's round was wasted on the far distance. Every few seconds the frail motor boat was lifted to full view on the crest of a wave—at these intervals Collins took advantage of seeing his foe and loosed off—then, before the trigger was properly pressed, she slid down a long incline to the trough of the sea, hidden from sight.

But the same heavy seas which prevented the three-pounder making good practice saved *Chi-Chi* from being smashed to matchwood. Under ordinary circumstances the U-boat's four-inch could have slowly battered her to flotsam as she moved, but firing at a stationary boat and at one which runs and swerves and jumps up and down like a cork on the waters are two very different propositions.

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Also, the German riflemen weren't doing anything worthy of being included in one's personal correspondence. They used up several hundred rounds of ball ammunition, it is true, but, save for chipping a splinter of wood from *Chi-Chi's* deck and neatly taking off Roderick's cap, these rounds did no harm whatever, but only increased the Britishers' determination to make that U-boat incapable of perpetrating further frightfulness ere the action was over.

Then, as she rounded the drifter's stern, *Chi-Chi* scored the first important hit. One of Collins's shells exploded on the U-boat's after part, and, instead of continuing to cruise slowly around so as to present the small target of her bows to the motor boat, the submarine stopped dead, having lost both her screws, and having acquired a rather decent-sized hole in her after part—a hole that would require a lot of plugging before she could consider submerging in safety.

Then the four-inch began to work double tides. It blazed and bellowed, and sent shells whizzing all around *Chi-Chi*. It seemed to Roderick that he was steering his little craft through a perfect forest of upflung water ; he noted, with a queer detachment, how some shells sent up great gouts

GLORY BY PROXY

of spume, and how others only made concave dents in the elastic fluid. Then came the round which wrenched *Chi-Chi's* ensign staff, with the flaunting Meteor flag, clean out of its socket.

The loss of his colours made Frazer rave ; he valued that bit of bunting more than any of those square winning pennants he had so hardly won at various regattas.

"Look after the steering, Wilkes," he called, suddenly.

He dropped the wheel, kicked off his sea-boots and struggled out of his oilskin coat. Then, with a clean dive, he took a header into the ramping seas, striking out with full force for that floating bit of dirty white bunting which was at once his credentials and *Chi-Chi's* proudest piece of equipment. Wilkes flung a Kisbie lifebuoy after him, and thereafter, for a space, forgot all about his commander in the excitement of the scrap.

Collins, knowing nothing of this, worked his gun like a man possessed, pouring forth, with each of his tiny shells, a stream of forcible and vivid objurgations on the foe who took so much strafing. Round again, this time behind the drifter, and Collins had time and opportunity

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to wipe from his forehead the blood pouring from a graze caused by a flying bullet ; also, he had time to note the arm of his lieutenant rising and falling regularly as, with the retrieved White Ensign in his clutch, Roderick struck out for the drifter.

That good vessel, meanwhile, had commenced to weigh the trawl which had up to now prevented her running away from the U-boat. Her steam winches clanked and groaned as they took the weight of the great trawl beam, and, as *Chi-Chi* shot once more into view of her target, the trawl beam appeared above water. And, three minutes later, Roderick Frazer clambered aboard the fishing vessel.

“ Here, skipper,” he called, “ what are you going to do about it ? Can’t you pay Fritz back a bit in his own coin ? ”

“ Well,” asked the skipper, “ what am I going to do it with ? I haven’t even a revolver aboard ; you see, we were too old—ship and men—to be taken over by the Admiralty for working with the Fleet—so we’re fishing in the ordinary way, and haven’t anything for protection.”

“ Hum ! ” exclaimed Roderick, musing. “ That’s bad. But what about your stem ; isn’t that good enough now ? ”

GLORY BY PROXY

" Well, I did think of ramming him, to be sure," came the reply. " But, you see, I was anchored by my trawl and couldn't move, else I should certainly have had a go at him before you appeared on the scene. Anyway, now I'm free, I'm going to see what can be done."

" Drifter, ahoy!" It was Wilkes hailing. *Chi-Chi* had completed still another circle of her target, and was now close alongside. " If you've finished with our skipper we'd like to have him back."

" Righto; come alongside," cried Roderick. " I'll jump."

Chi-Chi swept inwards with her accustomed sweetness and rubbed for an instant against the drifter's rusty plates. Frazer took the jump, still clutching the sodden White Ensign, and landed in the well. On the second *Chi-Chi* sped off, while Collins adjusted his sights ready to again open fire as the target came into view.

Round again, on the outer circumference of the circle. Wilkes, at the wheel, suddenly gasped a choking cry, threw up his hands and sank, a huddled mass, to the boat's well. Roderick, with a strangled curse, leapt to the swaying wheel and brought *Chi-Chi* back to her course

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like a swallow. Then, glancing over his shoulder, he saw the U-boat dead abeam, lazily rolling on the water.

"Hang on tight, all hands!" he yelled suddenly. "Collins, cease fire."

The three-pounder fired the round within her, and dropped to silence. Then it was Collins's turn to yell.

"The drifter's moving sir," he called. "She looks as though she intends to ram. Look, Fritz has seen the move, too; he's going to batter her with his gun while his riflemen keep us at bay."

"Is he?" snapped Frazer. "We'll see. I've no idea of losing this chap after all the trouble we've taken in the matter. Come aft here and take the wheel."

The pukka Navy gunlayer scrambled aft, over the twin fourteen-inch, explosive-charged torpedoes lying in their unused dropping gear. He took the wheel and received orders to keep *Chi-Chi* on her present course till further instructions were issued. Frazer bent to the dropping gear, pulled out a pin here and there, spun the torpedo propellers twice, and then looked up. With swift but infinite cunning he measured the dis-

GLORY BY PROXY

tance between himself and the disabled but still fighting submarine ; saw the range at which the drifter was preparing to ram, and smiled grimly.

“ Hard a-starboard,” he ordered.

Collins swung the wheel.

“ Port ten—’midships—steady,” commanded the steel-cold Frazer. “ Keep her at that.”

It looked as though *Chi-Chi* had it in mind to ram the U-boat. At the full stretch of her forty-odd knots, like a greyhound released from the leash, she darted on, her bows in a dead straight line with the diapered conning-tower. Collins gazed once, then nodded shortly, and that nod boded little good for Fritz.

Somebody aboard the submarine yelled a guttural order, and the four-inch spun round on its mounting and sought to turn *Chi-Chi* rudely and emphatically away. But *Chi-Chi* still dashed on ; her forefoot sending up a shower of spray and occasionally slicing through a big wave which raced to meet her. Then, with a low grunt of satisfaction, Frazer stooped to the dropping gear and slammed down a lever.

Collins yelled ; he was just too late.

“ Don’t fire, sir ; the drifter’s got her.”

“ And if he reaches her before my torpedo, he’s

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welcome to keep her," observed Frazer, straightening himself to watch the effect of the shot.

"Port fifteen," he yelled suddenly. *Chi-Chi* spun off from her original course just as a long shuddering boom rent the wintry air; just as the grey world was reddened by a lurid flash and the submarine was smothered in a tall column of spray and splinters. Then, as the column fell back to its parent waters, Roderick had a swift vision of the drifter reeling and staggering, and of the U-boat, split in two halves, filling and sinking, to fall, a steel tomb for her pirates, to the bed of the ocean.

Chi-Chi cruised over. The drifter received her with profanity, and demanded why the devil she had fired when it was a foregone conclusion that the submarine was about to be rammed.

"Well, to tell you the truth, skipper," said Frazer, "I thought Fritz's gun might make matchwood of you before you could get close enough, and, in the second place, I was already on my course and had dropped the torpedo before I noticed you were so near her. And I rather fancy it was my torpedo that settled her, and not your bows, though they seem to have received a terrific thump."

GLORY BY PROXY

"Well, so would you look as though you'd received a terrific thump if your bows had chewed through a U-boat's plates just as a torpedo exploded on his other side," countered the skipper. "As soon as I properly felt myself touching him, along came your tinfish, and, bless me, for a minute or two I thought you'd torpedoed me as well. And now my boat's damaged, and I shan't get the reward that's offered to merchantmen for sinking Huns in submarines."

"Well, it's hard lines," acceded Roderick. He gazed with an air of triumph at the pool of oil lazily floating on the surface close at hand; then he looked at the draggled White Ensign lying on the stern lockers, and the battle-grimed three-pounder in his bows. "Very hard lines," he repeated.

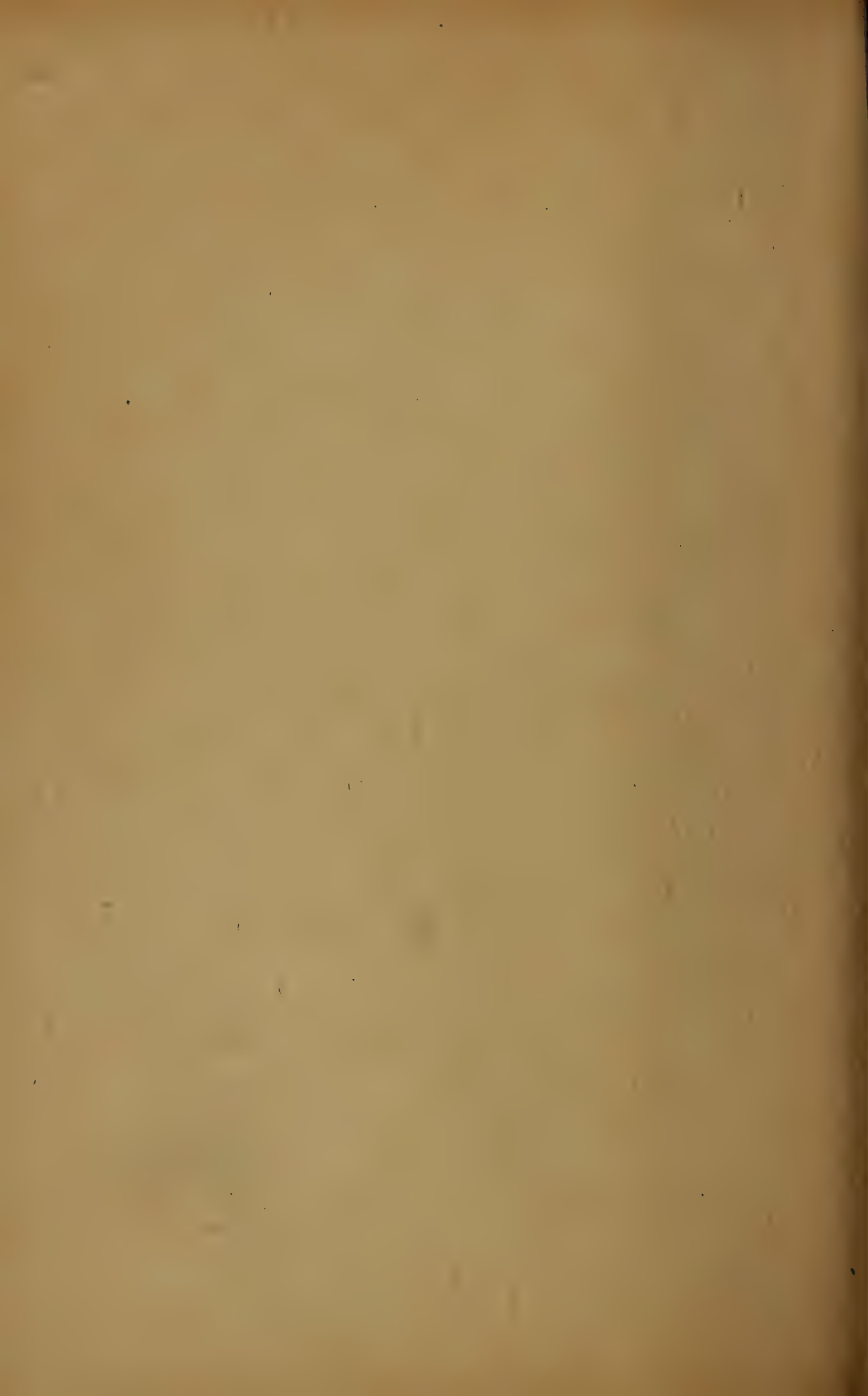
He pondered a full minute.

"Look here, skipper," he said graciously. "I'm sorry I've done you out of that reward, especially as it'll cost you a decent bit to repair your squashed bows. But I think you'd better report this little affair as if you'd sunk the U-boat, and I'll support your statement; then you'll get the glory, the honour, the prize money, the decorations, and maybe half the alphabet after

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your name, while I'll get—well, just nothing. But," and the temporary lieutenant scratched his head thoughtfully, " I'm afraid I shall have a hell of a job making the Naval Ordnance Officer believe that one fourteen-inch torpedo and about seventy rounds of three-pounder ammunition have been lost overboard on account of heavy weather."

STRAIGHT SHOOTING



STRAIGHT SHOOTING

III

STRAIGHT SHOOTING

"IF things don't begin to move pretty soon," remarked Temporary Lieutenant Roderick Frazer, R.N.V.R., "I shall begin to think this war is rather overrated as to its opportunities for excitement. Here we've been sculling around the canals of Northern Flanders for a week, and we haven't even seen a Hun, not to mention strafing one—why, I've had a far more exciting time pulling off a hot race at a regatta on many occasions."

He gazed around him as he spoke; at the long, sweet lines of *Chi-Chi*, his sixty-horse-power racing motor boat; at the Vickers semi-automatic three-pounder poking over her bows; at the brass-jacketed Maxim and the twin sets of torpedo dropping gear cluttering her deck. And, last of all, he searchingly scanned the vast flats on either side of the canal bank and, save for the rank reeds with which they were sowed, saw nothing.

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Away to the westward the dull thudding of heavy guns could be plainly heard, with occasional bursts of rifle fire, but, beyond these, and the whirring of an odd aeroplane or two passing overhead, the war might have been on the other side of the world.

"Monitor, forsooth!" went on Frazer, disgruntled by the monotony. "To hear 'em call us that you'd think we bristled with guns, or were capable of battering a town to bits, whereas we couldn't knock a house down at fifty yards, and, as for straight shooting, why we hardly know what it is."

"Jumper" Collins—a petty officer from the Navy and the only pukka fighting man in *Chi-Chi's* complement of six, bridled.

"I'll have you know, sir, with all due respect," he retorted, "that I can shove six holes in any target at any range in less than thirty seconds, and well you know it, too. You've seen some straight shooting since I've been with you, or else your eyesight's bad."

Frazer, strange to relate, took no notice of this outburst—this insubordination—save turning his head and grinning.

"I thought that'd fetch you, Jumper," he

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exclaimed. " You've been sitting like a stuffed mummy all the morning, and haven't opened your lips. Come on, if you've nothing better to do, spin us that yarn about the shark."

Mollified by the subtle compliment to his powers of narration—and imagination—Collins filled his pipe, scrambled aft to *Chi-Chi's* stern sheets so that all hands could be of his audience, and held forth, for the umpteenth time, regarding his sanguinary conflict with a shark in southern waters. The steersman, keeping one eye on Collins and the other on *Chi-Chi's* course, remained at his station, the remainder clustered round the garrulous and unveracious old salt, listening with all their ears. Anything would serve to break the eternal monotony only a little.

Collins had just reached the point where he turned over in the water and stabbed the finny enemy with his jack-knife, when the inevitable interruption came. Frazer, still looking ahead, saw, as *Chi-Chi* rounded a bend in the canal, a German supply train puffing along in the near distance.

" Hallo, a target ! " he exclaimed. " Jumper, if you don't mind, we'll be obliged with some of

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that straight shooting you were bragging about just now."

"Jumper" didn't mind a bit. With a curse at not being able to finish his story, he scrambled forward and wrenched the canvas cover from the three-pounder, while "Little Mary's" crew—Little Mary was their pet name for the weapon—loaded and brought her to the "ready."

With the certainty born of long experience, "Jumper" judged the range to be about five thousand yards, but, to test that judgment, he fired a ranging round. It fell well short in a smother of brown smoke and mud-coloured dust, and the gunlayer's profanity burst forth afresh. A hasty alteration of sights followed, and through his telescope the layer could see the train putting on a fresh burst of speed.

"Not so fast, my lad," muttered Collins, as he again pressed trigger. This time the shell fell just ahead of the engine, nicely spaced for elevation but a little out in deflection. The third round bored a hole in the tender, the fourth and fifth splintered the boarding of the foremost carriage, and then, of course, something went wrong with the works. The breech closed on a full round, the trigger snapped, but, instead of the gun leaping back

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with a sharp bark, she remained perfectly stationary and silent.

“ Missfire,” yelled Collins. “ Recock.”

The breechworker recocked his firing pin, and again that hollow click was heard. But the gun still remained unfired.

Then it was that Collins did a mad thing. Utterly regardless of the danger to himself, and of the regulation which plainly and rigorously states that an interval of half an hour must elapse between the occurrence of a missfire and the opening of a gun breech, he motioned the crew aside, and grasped the breech lever.

“ Duck, damn you, duck,” he yelled, but before those in *Chi'-Chi's* stern could bob down, the breech had been flung open, and the perfectly sound cartridge flung to the rear by the mechanism of the gun. Collins picked it up and swiftly examined it. The percussion cap in its base was as smooth and undented as on the day of its manufacture, so the gunlayer, knowing exactly where to look for the trouble, spun round to examine the firing pin.

This he found broken off for half its length, and once more a stream of profanity rippled forth.

“ Just my luck,” moaned Collins. “ Exactly

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as I find the range and settle down to a bit of practice something's bound to happen. It'll take three full minutes to shift this for a new firing pin, and by that time the train will be out of sight."

Temporary Lieutenant Roderick Frazer suddenly remembered that the railway line curved sharply towards the canal at a spot about a mile to the northward, and acted accordingly. Without any explanations he swung *Chi-Chi's* bows round, called upon her motors for a burst of that speed which had so freely decorated his sideboard with silver trophies of victory in racing, and personally supervised the steering.

"Get it shifted quick, Collins," he ordered. "I'll give you another chance at her."

Collins stared for a second, then bent to the breech and did things with a spanner, so that, at the very instant when the hurrying train came again into view, the three-pounder was once more ready to bark and bite.

"Commence firing," cried Roderick.

Collins needed no second order; the three-pounder spat and barked; the foremost part of the train became hidden behind a thin brown haze of high explosive, but still the engine thundered on. Then, quite suddenly, there ascended

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to heaven a fan-shaped tongue of vivid fire ; a mighty explosion seemed to rock the earth and a cloud of smoke to rise out of the very ground. And when the light breeze drifted the smoke away, that armoured train was a smoking ruin, rent and torn and flung in all directions by the explosion of a three-pounder shell in the very heart of its ammunition wagon.

“ And that’s a change, anyway,” remarked Collins, as he sponged out Little Mary. “ Now, who’s got any comments to make about straight shooting ? ”

Nobody had, at that moment, though Frazer made vigorous remarks respecting a seventeen-inch howitzer which the Huns brought up behind a dune, and which started to drop its huge missiles into the canal, too near to *Chi-Chi* to be comfortable.

“ We’ll move, I think, and maybe find something else that needs strafing,” he said.

But, though *Chi-Chi* searched diligently, she found nothing till late that afternoon, although she quested through all sorts of mazy little canals, up and down the thickly-reeded backwaters. Fritz seemed to be having a rest quite a long way off.

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Then came the second act of the drama. High up in the heavens a Boche observation balloon swayed and bucketed at the end of its anchor rope, and told a Boche field battery just how the shells they directed at the "Old Contemptibles" were falling. Collins, as soon as he saw the "sausage," spat on his hands, and screwed his eye into the gunsight. But, though he lifted Little Mary to her highest elevation, he could not get sufficient altitude to come within several thousand feet of that swaying shape in the clouds; therefore, as was his wont, he swore once more, vividly and incandescently.

"Just a bit lower, my lad," he said, addressing the distant target. "And I'll put the wind up you without fail."

"If you'll keep quiet and make a noise like a shadow, Jumper," said Frazer, presently, "I'll make you a present of that chap. He'll have to descend some time before nightfall, and, as we've to hide ourselves pretty effectually in this reed-grown backwater, we'll wait till he comes down, and then baptise him—with our blessings."

And wait they did—they could do nothing more. One hand passed a line from *Chi-Chi's* bow and stern to the beach and brought the end

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back aboard so that they could slip in case of sudden emergency; another washed down her grimy decks; a third polished up the twin fourteen-inch torpedoes resting in the dropping gear; Frazer and the engineer overhauled their beloved engines, while Collins examined and oiled every component part of the gun. Then came tea—a meal of hard biscuits and petrol-tainted coffee drunk from enamelled mugs—and finally the sausage was observed to be descending.

“Stand by,” cried Collins.

He and his crew of two closed up round the three-pounder.

“When I start firing,” ordered “Jumper,” “smack the rounds into the gun as fast as you know how—you put ’em into the gun, and I’ll put ’em into Fritz. But, if there’s any delay, we shall be all messed up, and have all our trouble for nothing. That’ll please me, you know, and I dare say Roddy ’ll be half off his head with delight—I don’t think!”

Presently the huge bulk of the observation balloon—now looming bigger than ever—came into view through the sighting telescope. But Collins held his fire for five minutes after that, and then, with a suddenness that was almost

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startling, the Vickers commenced to bark rapidly and shrilly.

Those in the observation balloon were astounded ; they had considered themselves safe from attack from all but one certain specified quarter, therefore this new antagonist who could not be seen, and who seemed so virulent, astonished, and later, frightened them.

One reached for the ripping cord and pulled it, and the gas commenced to escape rapidly, allowing the balloon to sink swifter towards the earth and safety. Then came a stream of shells as Little Mary chattered at a new and readjusted range, and the rope upon which half a score of men were hauling was cut through as neatly as by a knife. The observation balloon, released for the first time in her existence, shot upwards a hundred feet, and then, caught by the breeze, floated over towards *Chi-Chi's* place of concealment, the shells playing round her the whole time.

"Quick," cried Collins. "The special projectiles. Get 'em in smart ; there's no time to lose, and shrapnel isn't much good in this case."

The special incendiary shells whizzed through the air and burst into thousands of tiny fragments, but still none hit the rapidly travelling

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gasbag. Then, in a flash of time, a tiny red ball of fire appeared at her nose, a long tongue of flame licked out, and she fell earthwards, bows down, with the flames making a meal of her carcass—a beacon for miles around.

“Crikey!” exclaimed Collins. “Looks like a blooming Zeppelin afire, like they had in the picture papers a few weeks back. They always reckon those Zepps can’t be hit by gunfire, but, anyway, this is more than a fair imitation of the thing, by all accounts.”

The glare died away as the blazing gasbag reached the earth, and twilight settled down on the world once more. Frazer was filled with glee; he opened a jar of strong, raw, pungent rum, and issued a special “tot” all round by way of commemorating the exploit.

“And now,” said he, when all hands had toasted the gunlayer whose straight shooting had disposed of this second enemy in the one day, “we’ll move, I think.”

Chi-Chi backed astern right down the backwater, but, as she reached the point where it joined the main canal, she felt a shudder along her whole length, heaved twice convulsively, and stopped dead.

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"Hallo! we're aground, and likely to have to stay here for the night," observed Frazer. "We must have found a mudbank that isn't on the chart."

"Ay," replied Collins. "And we've found something else that isn't on the chart, too—trouble."

He waved his arm at the dim shore, and there, clear and distinct, appeared the forms of some score of infantrymen. They had formed part of the guard of the observation balloon's station, and had been sent out to locate the boat whose shooting had brought down that unwieldy craft. Finding her as she backed down-stream and knowing of the mudbank that guarded that entrance to the backwater, they had waited till she ran aground, meaning to dispose of her at their ease. And, even as Collins spoke, the first rifle cracked, and a splinter flew from *Chi-Chi's* deck.

Frazer dropped the wheel and sprang to the brass-jacketed Maxim fitted on the boat's stern. He whisked round its muzzle and, as the engineer passed a belt of cartridges through the gun, pressed the trigger. The staccato chattering of the weapon filled the silence with a deadly menace,

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and the twenty forms swiftly disappeared as the Germans dropped to the ground and sought for cover.

But, as they crawled, they fired, and the bullets flew all around the motor boat and her gallant half-dozen. One man got a round through the fleshy part of his thigh, and dropped into the well, where the bulk of the motors screened him. But, realising that the engines were more precious than his body, he dragged himself round till they were behind him and protected from flying shots, when he used the excellent Lee-Enfield rifle allotted to him deliberately and with great precision whenever a flash in the reeds gave him a target to fire at.

"Those chaps are getting too close to be comfortable, and the reeds stop us from locating 'em too well," remarked Frazer, half to himself, in a pause in the Maxim's chattering.

Collins heard the words, and a queer glint came into his eye. Selecting a special incendiary shell with extreme care, and pulling it from the brass cartridge case which held it, he poured half the contained cordite into his handkerchief, which he secured to the nose of the shell with a piece of yarn. Then, screwing the shell into the case

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again, he inserted the contraption into the gun with extreme care, and, putting the piece to its lowest angle of elevation, fired.

The shell, all unseen, described a slight arc in the air, and fell into the centre of the reeds exactly opposite *Chi-Chi*—right in the middle of the place from where the rifle fire was coming in hottest volume. And, as it fell, the percussion fuze of the shell exploded, and, besides sending flaming fragments to all quarters of the compass, ignited the loose cordite in the handkerchief. The cordite blazed with a terrific heat; the reeds nearest at hand caught fire, and, fanned by the light breeze, swiftly became a raging sea of a conflagration.

The German infantrymen turned and raced for safety; those unlucky ones who had been wounded by *Chi-Chi's* fire and those who were otherwise unable to escape died swift but terrible deaths in that inferno, and once again the falling night was illumined as by a beacon.

Frazer ceased fire in astonishment; it was not until Collins reported to him afterwards that he realised what had happened. The half-dozen hands of *Chi-Chi's* crew gazed ashore silently; only the man with the bullet in his thigh spoke.

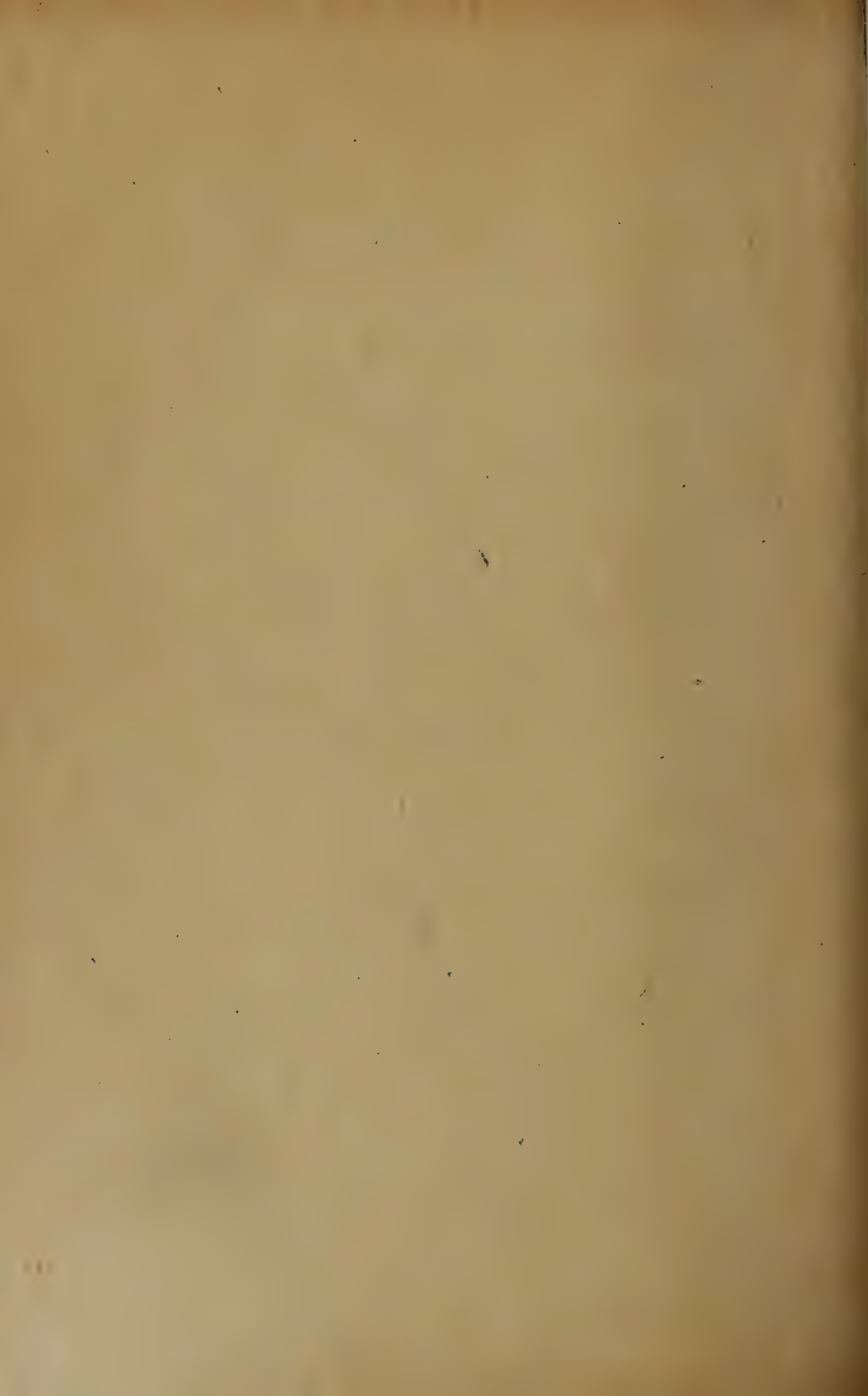
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“ Oh, my God ! ” he muttered. “ What a hell, my God ! What a hell ! ”

The glare brought up two other canal monitors, both heavier and better armed than *Chi-Chi*. Naturally, they wanted to hear the whole yarn, but the horror of the thing was too fresh for any of *Chi-Chi*'s men to talk about.

“ Is there anything we can do ? ” finally asked the senior officer, who, by the way, was Frazer's junior.

“ Yes,” responded Frazer, as though awaking from a bad dream. “ One of you can carry on patrolling the river while the other tows us off. I'm going home to keep pigeons or something of that sort ; this war provides too many horrible phases of excitement for a man of my quiet tastes. Oh, by the way, if either of you really needs an expert with a gun, you can borrow Collins here. Besides being the finest narrator of shark stories that I've ever heard, he's just about the finest exponent in the whole of the British Navy—and that means the whole of the world—of the art of Straight Shooting.”



A CLOSE CALL

A CLOSE CALL

IV

A CLOSE CALL

IT may have been that Those In Authority were influenced by the fact that His Britannic Majesty's Armed Motor Patrol Boat *Chi-Chi* had, during her short career as a warship, performed many gallant acts with an efficiency of which the pukka Service might be proud ; it may be that they considered the lean, wicked-looking regulation Vickers semi-automatic three-pounder poking over her bows, the tiny brass jacketed Maxim cocked perkily on her stern and the twin sets of Navy-pattern, fourteen-inch dropping gear—each containing a brand new and highly efficient torpedo—on her narrow deck sufficient armanent to take her safely to any spot of the navigable seas ; it may have been that they thought her complement of six, all told—including one “ Jumper ” Collins, petty officer, R.N., as fine a shot as ever squinted through a gunsight—were reckless enough to dare anything. Anyhow, they had chosen *Chi-Chi* for the somewhat arduous job

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of protecting from the too pressing attentions of the enemy the trawlers and drifters engaged in sweeping mines from the seaways off the Belgian Coast. But, whatever the reason for their choice, Those in Authority condescended not to explain it to Temporary Lieutenant Roderick Frazer, R.N.V.R., when they issued orders for him to take his boat to that warm corner of the sea battlefield, there to carry out such work as might lie nearest at hand in the intervals of beating off stray U-boats which cropped up at irregular intervals to strafe such craft as were more lightly armed than themselves. And, of course, Roderick being for the nonce a fighting sailorman, he asked no questions ; he only laughed long and bitterly when the full purport of his mission dawned upon him.

“ ‘ Fishery protection vessel,’ forsooth,” he scoffed. “ That’s a good, old-fashioned, high-sounding name to give us, but it won’t help us any across the pond, I’m thinking. Fat lot of good we’ll be if they send a torpedo boat against us—or maybe two or three. We’ll then find our best weapon is the forty-odd knots *Chi-Chi* can turn out when she’s pressed, for we’ll certainly have the choice of ending our fighting days

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suddenly or running away from a scrap—which, incidentally, is a thing I hate to do.”

“ You *are* a blooming pessimist, sir,” put in Collins, the only real Navyman in the boat’s complement, and the high priest at the shrine of the three-pounder. “ You’re never satisfied. And, anyway, what’s the use of fighting or running away from torpedo craft—or U-boats either—till we see some. As like as not we’ll never clap eyes on a Fritz for months—it’s just as well that the weather’s ideal for fishing, and that I brought my conger line. That’s just the identical thing for a job like this—it’ll catch anything from sardines to sharks—and maybe U-boats.”

Roderick’s eyes twinkled ; he had only grumbled so as to draw the loquacious Collins into an argument.

“ Speaking of sharks, Jumper,” he observed ; “ we haven’t heard that shark story of yours for quite a long time. Do you mind obliging ? ”

“ Jumper ” didn’t mind at all. His shark story—the only one of his highly-coloured imaginative efforts which ever survived its birth—improved every time it was told ; the gunlayer having and indulging a knack of adding fresh details on the occasion of each narration.

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He told that shark story—with variations—at three-hour intervals during the following week—a week when not a single thing happened to break the monotony of long summer days, and when the fish absolutely declined to look at the bait on the end of the conger line. At last even Roderick grew tired of hearing it.

“I’ll try fishing, for a change, I think,” said that officer at length. “No, I shan’t want your line, Jumper; thanks for offering it, all the same. I’m after bigger fish than conger—more dangerous even than sharks—little round things with horns that are guaranteed to explode the whole caboodle if you even sneeze out of turn.”

“I’ve never seen that kind, sir,” observed the gunlayer. “What might you call ’em.”

“Lots of things—mostly uncomplimentary,” came the laughing answer. “Fritz calls ’em mines, however, and this little corner of the ocean is his favourite breeding place for the dear things.”

“Oh, I see,” retorted Collins. “I didn’t tumble to your meaning, at first, sir. What’re you going to use for a line and hook, sir, and can I lend you any bait?”

“That remains to be seen and considered,”

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replied Frazer. "I've just been struck with the idea, and haven't yet gone into details. Run away; I want to think."

But though the Temporary Lieutenant thought and thought, cudgelling his brains for a means of mine-angling, he could form no feasible plan. Collins, fishing in the bows, kept one eye on his line and the other on his chief. Suddenly he bent and picked up the boat's anchor—a strong, wrought-steel affair, weighing half a hundred-weight, to which was attached some two hundred fathoms of astoundingly strong steel chain cable.

"Here's your hook and line, sir," he called. "Tell me the sort of bait you'll use, and I'll shove it on for you."

"By Jove!" exclaimed the commander. "The identical thing! If we lower the anchor overside for, say, ten fathoms it will hang clear midway between surface and sea bed, without touching the bottom. Then, as we go ahead slowly, it ought to catch in the moorings of any mines underkeel and pull their sinkers out of the mud. We shall then be able to weigh the anchor, haul the whole contraption to the surface, cut the moorings, allow the sinker to drop back into the pond, and have a Bisley competition with

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revolvers at the mine as it floats. It'll be great sport ! ”

He explained the idea in all its details to his crew, who immediately saw its every possibility. Everybody wanted to help—they were only too willing to break the deadly monotony in any conceivable fashion ; and presently the anchor swung at twelve fathoms—this depth being exactly half the soundings in these particular waters—while the chain cable was snubbed securely in a small, vice-like slip in such a manner that any sudden or heavy strain upon the chain would neither break it nor wrench it loose.

Then *Chi-Chi* went ahead inside the toiling legitimate minesweepers, cruising slowly on her appointed beat. All her hands watched that cable as it slowly tailed out astern with the boat's way, but for a long time the strange fishing tackle caught nothing. Then, quite suddenly, *Chi-Chi* gave a quick jerk ; her engines coughed and slowed as they felt the strain of a heavy object astern. The cable tautened out like a bar, and a rusty red sphere appeared for a second above the surface. Then, as the fishing tackle hauled its sinker clear of the embracing mud, *Chi-Chi* shuddered and slewed.

A CLOSE CALL

“A bite,” yelled Frazer. “All hands weigh anchor.”

All hands dropped their jobs and bent to the cable—all save the engineer and helmsman, who perforce must remain at their posts—and presently that rusty sphere appeared once more—a medium sized mine with half a score of deadly horns protruding at all angles. With infinite care Frazer slipped the bight of a rope under the horns and thus held the mine while Collins hacked through the wire rope of its moorings with an axe. At last the rusty sinker fell once more with a gurgle to its home on the sea bed, and the released mine bobbed helplessly down on the tide.

Chi-Chi's half-dozen improved the shining hour by trying to score bulls on those horns with their pistols, but hitting a point no bigger than a penny even at twenty yards requires the skill of an expert, and the plating of the mine turned off the leaden bullets as though of no more weight than raindrops. Collins, growing impatient, suddenly slipped the canvas cover from the three-pounder, and snicked home her breech on a full round. Taking careful aim, he fired, and the tiny three-pound shell tore its way through the boiler plating of which the mine was fashioned.

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All hands looked to see a gigantic explosion—an upflung gout of water momentarily blotting out sea and sky. Therefore, when the mine, instead of bursting, simply filled with sea water and sank harmlessly, they were a trifle disappointed.

“What a swindle!” laughed Roderick. “We might have let that chap stop in the sea for all the harm he could have done. Come on—we shan’t always catch duds; get the hook overside again.”

But, though *Chi-Chi* toiled diligently, she got nothing more exciting than a couple of nibbles before the advent of darkness put a stop to her queer pastime.

But, when morning came, Frazer and his crew were keener than ever on the new game, and in the course of their first two hours’ fishing managed to hook two small specimens of the genus *Minien*—the second of which, declared Collins, was much tinier than the fishery regulations allowed to be killed and which ought to be put back to grow bigger. The first, however, as soon as the entangled cable and anchor commenced to tow it, exploded gloriously, drenching *Chi-Chi* and her half-dozen sportsmen with the upflung water.

Then, just before midday, came the great bite.

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The cable suddenly snubbed out as taut as a steel bar; the vice-like slip screamed and groaned, but held on tenaciously to the straining chain. *Chi-Chi's* engines coughed grumblingly as, exerting their full horse-power, they broke out the sinker, but, try as they would, they could hardly keep steerage way on the boat. And, even when the engineer opened out the throttle to its widest extent, *Chi-Chi* found that her suddenly developed incubus limited her speed to a bare ten knots.

"Crikey!" cried Frazer. "We've caught a whale. Every soul to weigh anchor."

The engineer closed his regulator valve; the helmsman lashed his wheel to lend a hand in the landing of the monster, but even then *Chi-Chi's* crew could hardly move it.

"Feels as if we're weighing the bed of the North Sea," commented one.

"Maybe we've got Australia hooked on," observed a second.

"Perhaps its a U-boat," put in the engineer.

"Or your fat aunt!" snapped Roderick. "Stop estimating what it might be and put your backs into it—get it up and see for yourselves what we've caught. Maybe it'll be big enough to show on the beach in a tent, at a penny a head."

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Chi-Chi's stalwarts hauled—they put their backs, every ounce of their strength and the moral backing of their more or less immortal souls into their work; they braced their feet against anything that came handy the better to obtain a purchase—but, haul as they would, they could only weigh a couple of inches of that cable at a pull. And when at the end of the half-hour exhaustion compelled a rest from their labours, they had gained exactly three feet.

Of course, the interruption had to come just at this crucial moment. A big unterseeboote, thirsting for blood, poked his periscope above the surface not more than a mile away; then, seeing the motor boat in difficulties, rose till his conning tower was above water, and commenced to ask *Chi-Chi*—in a rude voice and through the medium of an efficiently-worked four-inch gun—what might be her business in these waters. Collins turned to send her the requisite answer, while the engineer jumped to his motors and Frazer to the wheel.

“Full speed ahead,” yelled the latter. “Here starts the running away business I mentioned in the beginning.”

But *Chi-Chi* could not run, though her engines

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leapt into full vigour on the word and her first leap took her ten feet onward. Then, with a sobbing heave, she brought up short, and though her engines gasped and pulsed as though conscious of the threatening danger, they could not push her ahead at more than ten knots per hour—the weight of that mine towing astern was as a brake on her usually swift movements.

Also, to make matters worse, the German's third round tore *Chi-Chi's* best and biggest tooth—the three-pounder—clean out of its mounting and cast it overside. She could neither bite nor run.

Those remaining on the forecastle took the turns of the cable off the small cleat and let the anchor run out again, hoping that its sudden release would clear the flukes of the hook from the mine moorings, thus allowing the mine to sink once more to its former depth. But, with the malign perversity of inanimate things, the mine refused to be cleared—*Chi-Chi* had picked it up without invitation, and it now appeared as though she would have, willy-nilly, to keep it. Therefore, though it was a sore handicap, the motor boat had to tow the mine after her. Collins tried to knock the slip off the cable, and smashed a finger

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in the attempt—the slip was immovable. Also, the Germans, seeing that something unusual caused *Chi-Chi*'s men to gather on her forecastle, started sniping with revolvers, and, by dint of expending some three hundred rounds, at last hit Weekes in the thigh and put a second man out of action.

Roderick, white with passion, seized an axe and attacked the chain cable, prepared to sacrifice his anchor and cable if only he could get away. But the stout steel laughed at the keen axe blade and quite suddenly the head of the weapon flew overboard, leaving the frantic lieutenant with the helve—a useless piece of timber—in his hands. Frazer stood up to curse, and as he did so caught sight of that which gave birth to the second Great Idea.

“Keep our stern on the Boche,” yelled the lieutenant to the helmsman. “We’ll be a smaller target and he’ll have to close us to do good shooting. Then, when he gets within range, we may be able to give a fair account of ourselves with the Maxim, and go out fighting, after all.”

It seemed as though the unterseeboote sensed Roderick's intentions, for at that second he sent

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along another round from his four-inch—a round which exploded in mid-air above *Chi-Chi's* stern. And when the smoke of its bursting cleared away, the Maxim stand was empty—the perky little brass-jacketed weapon had gone to keep its three-pounder comrade company in the depths.

“It’s no use,” cried Frazer, half in despair. “We haven’t anything left to fight with but the torpedoes, and we can’t steam fast enough to use those. But we’ll try ’em as a last resort, all the same.”

He slewed the labouring *Chi-Chi* till her bows were dead in line with the oncoming submarine, and fired both her brand-new, fourteen-inch torpedoes at once. But, swift as Frazer was, Fritz was swifter. He flung up his conning-tower hatch, housed his gun, and slid from sight in the space of three seconds, and when *Chi-Chi's* torpedoes arrived at the spot at which they had been aimed, their target was a good twenty feet in the depths below them.

The German commander smiled largely as he thought of the ease with which, after all, he might capture this motor boat. He saw himself, in fancy, being invested with at least the Iron Cross; saw the flags decorating the port to

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welcome him home ; heard the bands playing, the populace cheering him and his merry men. You see, so few craft flying the White Ensign have been taken into enemy ports that the capture of even so small a ship as *Chi-Chi* would be looked upon as a great achievement—and, at the worst, the Wireless Press might be counted upon to magnify her till she assumed no less proportions than those of a battle-cruiser.

But, unfortunately, that unterseeboote commander had forgotten that trite old proverb about first catching your hare before jugging it. But, with a scheme in his mind, instead of rising to the surface after Frazer's torpedoes had missed him, he kept on a course in *Chi-Chi's* wake, at twenty feet depth. And as he followed he took stock of his puny antagonist. He noticed that both her guns had gone ; that her now worse than useless dropping gear hung empty overside, and he rubbed his hands in anticipation of an easy task.

" This case will present no difficulties whatever," he muttered. " We will rise just astern of her where our gun will be in a position to punch her full of holes if necessary, and our pistols ready to use to full effect if they decline to surrender.

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I see, by the name on her stern, that this is none other than the famous *Chi-Chi*—the much-talked-about hunter of unterseeboten. Well, it will be a good joke if the hunted catches the huntsman—we'll rise and see about it."

Accordingly, still laughing, he gave orders for bringing his command to the surface, still keeping his eye glued to the periscope. So near now were the two vessels that the *Boche* could count every button on Frazer's coat and see the fixed determination of that young gentleman's face; also, he saw a man in the uniform of the hated British Navy—Petty Officer "Jumper" Collins—bandaging his hand in the boat's well.

Then, with a swirl, he thrust his periscope and conning tower above the surface.

Frazer, watching the wake astern, saw him rise—saw, also, something which at first caused his heart to miss a beat, and then filled it with a strange joy—something which Fritz, absorbed in contemplation of *Chi-Chi's* miserable state, had missed. Just abaft the U-boat's conning tower, resting on her whaleback and with deadly detonating horns sticking out in half a hundred places, and with *Chi-Chi's* anchor and cable still hooked and entangled in its wire-rope moorings, lay the

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father and mother of all mines—a monster, some twelve feet across.

Then, even as realisation dawned upon Frazer and his half-dozen, the expected happened. The U-boat gave a sudden lurch; the mine rolled over slightly, jamming in one of those devilish horns. Followed a flash that lit up the whole sea and blotted out even the sun; a crashing explosion that deafened every one of Frazer's men; a monster wave that lifted the little vessel and hurled her forward out of reach of the rain of fragments of steel—and other things—that immediately commenced to drop from the air above.

When *Chi-Chi's* crew at length regained their feet they naturally looked aft again. They saw no U-boat, no mine—only a few floating rags of cloth and a wide-spreading path of oil marking the spot where the unterseeboote had been.

“What—what happened, sir?” gasped Collins, when at last he could speak.

Roderick waved a deprecating hand.

“Fritz made too sure of us, that's all,” he announced. “He rose astern, meaning to punch us to matchwood with his gun. But he didn't calculate that we were towing a mine, or that it

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rested on his whaleback when he appeared on the surface. He lurched, and touched off one of the horns, and—pouff ! ”

He gazed aft once more at the ever-widening oil patch and reverently removed his cap.

“ Our guns gone, torpedoes gone, and a brake on our speed,” he mused. “ You were just a little too eager, Fritz ; you were hoist on your own petard. But, ’pon my soul, if you hadn’t taken my only anchor and a dozen fathoms of my best cable to the bottom with you, I’m hanged if I couldn’t find a spark or two of sympathy for you ! ”

“TWO’S COMPANY!”

"TWO'S COMPANY!"

V

"TWO'S COMPANY!"

THE fleet collier *Makindu* slowed to a standstill, and brayed with her syren like a lost soul. And, as a matter of fact, she was lost. As becomes a wise steamship captain caught in a dense fog somewhere near a newly-laid and as yet uncharted minefield, her skipper decided to wait for a guiding hand before proceeding farther, lest the voyage end, not in the Grand Fleet's base harbour, but in a warmer place, where there is neither sea nor ships nor international warfare.

And, as it happened, the *Makindu* hadn't to wait long. Like a grey wraith His Majesty's Armed Motor Patrol Boat *Chi-Chi* stole along, her coxswain's thin whistle replying to the agonised groans of the bigger ship's syren. On her forecastle, hidden in a suit of black oilskins, Temporary Lieutenant Roderick Frazer, R.N.V.R. —*Chi-Chi*'s peace-time owner and war-time commander—stood in consultation with Petty Officer "Jumper" Collins, the only pukka Navy man

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among *Chi-Chi*'s half-dozen of a crew and the high priest of the regulation Vickers semi-automatic three-pounder which leered wickedly over the motor boat's forecastle.

Slowly, cannily, *Chi-Chi* ranged within hail of the collier.

"What're you bleating at, skipper?" queried Frazer. "Lost your guardian angel, I suppose, and want some one to hold your hand in the dark, is that it?"

"Not exactly," replied the *Makindu*'s captain. "But I happen to have coal for the Grand Fleet, and, believing that they're in some harbour hereabouts, I'd like to deliver the goods. But this blessed fog has played the dickens with all my reckonings, and, to tell the solid truth, I don't quite know whether, if I alter course, I'll strike Scotland or the Belgian coast."

"If you just move on about half a mile and then turn sharp to the right you'll pick up the Grand Fleet harbour," answered *Chi-Chi*'s commander.

"Thanks." The *Makindu*'s engine-room bells rang and her screw commenced to flog the water at her stern.

"Whoa!" yelled Frazer, seeing her move.

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“ Don't get romping about too freely just here, skipper, or you'll strike a mine and go to glory in a spout of spume and splinters. Didn't you know there was a minefield round here ? ”

“ No—my chart says nothing about it, anyway,” replied the other, slowing his ship once more. “ What the dickens am I to do ? ”

“ Well,” observed the lieutenant. “ Seeing that we're toddling off home, you can stick to our tail and be led down the strait and narrow path of safety, if you like, though it'll be somewhat of a nuisance having to throttle our speed down to your crawl. Come on—fall in astern.”

Chi-Chi romped ahead smoothly and the collier, nothing loth, moved in her wake. So close were the two vessels that those on the latter's bridge could see every detail of the motor boat, as she moved, like an animated cockleshell, far below them. And, as is the wont of sailormen, those aboard the collier asked many questions in a ribald manner, and got replies every bit as ribald, and in many cases, absolutely destitute of all veracity.

They demanded to be informed what the brass-jacketed thing cocked up on *Chi-Chi's* stern might be used for—it was really a Maxim

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gun, but Collins temporarily promoted it to the dubious dignity of a new-pattern coffee mill, wherewith submarines might, by permission of *Chi-Chi's* commander, grind their breakfast coffee daily. Also, the same oracle declared that the twin sets of pukka Navy-pattern dropping gear, each containing a brand-new, highly-efficient fourteen-inch torpedo, which cluttered the motor boat's narrow decks, were nothing more deadly than a new type of lobster pot for replenishing with fresh shellfish the larders of the big battle-ships. The wireless outfit in its twelve-pound box became a lending library—*Chi-Chi* offered to swap half a dozen well-thumbed magazines for a bundle of newspapers, but the collier couldn't deal on account of stock being exhausted; while the miniature searchlight was rechristened as a special headlight for Frazer's motor cycle, brought aboard to be repaired.

Indeed, to hear Collins camouflaging *Chi-Chi's* warlike equipment one would have thought him ashamed of his craft and her weapons, instead of which nobody took greater pride therein than the pukka Navy gunlayer.

And, all the while this game of bantering cross-question was going on, *Chi-Chi* was guiding

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her bigger sister along the edge of the new mine-field, towards where opened a lane capable of safe navigation. The fog became very patchy in parts—occasionally fifty-yard spaces of clear air would be encountered, and it was when the *Makindu* entered one of these that *Chi-Chi* would forge ahead to scout in the place where the fog again closed in, just to make sure that it was safe for the fleet collier to proceed.

It was on the third of these occasions that “ Jumper ” Collins, standing idly by the covered three-pounder, stiffened and, without speaking, pointed ahead. Frazer, following the pointing finger, saw the surface of the sea commence to boil, and, from out the dead centre of the boiling, a long, broomstick-like periscope appear. He nodded, and without a word Collins stripped the cover from his gun, snicked home the breech upon a full round, and stood by to commence firing as soon as such a course might become necessary.

But, just on the instant, the fog swirled and shut out all sight of that broomstick-like object as completely as though it were not in existence. “ Jumper ” swore ; Frazer said things that were not prayers—at least, not of the regular type—but

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of course neither could do anything more. As they stood cursing, the *Makinda* forged ahead and almost ran them down with her bluff stem.

Frazer was struck with a sudden idea.

"Throw me a line, skipper," he yelled. "Slow down, and listen to me."

Wondering immensely, the skipper carried out his escort's orders.

"There's a Fritz off to port somewhere," announced Frazer. "We saw him in a clear patch just now, but lost him again when the mist shut down. He evidently is looking out for you—perhaps he's got a little present to deliver; something like a twenty-one-inch torpedo—so if you'll take my advice you'll keep your eyes skinned. I'm just going to leave you and scout round, so don't move too far away from here, or you'll come to a violent end. By the way, though, if you should see his periscope, you might turn towards it and make him believe you're going to ram. Even if he does smack a torpedo at you he'll have a job to hit while you only show him your bows, and you'll still be safe. What I want you to do is to lure him to the surface, then I'll drop on him like a load of bricks—and we'll share the resultant prize money. Understand?"

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The skipper understood, and expressed his willingness to co-operate—there still rankled bitterly in his memory the recollection of a good ship sinking under his feet, while a U-boat lay on the surface and gloated over her defenceless, non-combatant victim.

“ I'm with you,” he said. “ I'll do my best to kid him that he's got an easy target, and leave the rest to you.”

Chi-Chi slid off in the mist, conned carefully by the lieutenant and with Collins's Navy-trained eyes searching the gloom on all sides. But though she cast about diligently, though she searched the waters as thoroughly as might be expected, she found nothing. Then, in the flash of an eyelid, she became aware of a steep, bluff bow that towered over her, that, rushing onward at full speed, threatened to destroy her.

The motor boat's helmsman, with a twist of his wheel, snatched the frail craft from the very jaws of destruction ; Collins opened his mouth to pour forth objurgations on the clumsy seaman who handled the larger craft. But, in an instant of heaven-born inspiration, Roderick clapped a hand over his subordinate's mouth.

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The *Makindu's* skipper bent over his bridge, his two hands a trumpet to his mouth.

"Got her," he said. "She rose within fifty feet just as the fog-wreath swirled away again, and before she had time to turn I jumped down on her. I did intend to ram and sink her, but I'm afraid I've only chopped off her periscope. At least, we felt no bump as we should have done had our keel touched her hull."

"That's all right, skipper," replied Roderick. "You've done your part; now it's up to us to finish her off. Stop your engines and lie still; she's bound to come up and have a look at the hooker that's knocked her eye out, and till she rigs her spare periscope she'll not be able to torpedo you from below. And, if she starts shooting, she'll find somebody else at the same game—and I'll lay odds on my gunlayer being the best."

He removed his hand from Collins's mouth and acknowledged the petty officer's ironical bow with a grin.

"Now we'll just hide and make a noise like a fog bank, I think," went on Frazer, "while we're doing the Micawber stunt—waiting for something to turn up."

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For ten full minutes the fleet collier lay motionless; the fog wreaths swirled around her, at one moment completely enveloping her and hiding her, at the next swooping clear and exposing her in all her defenceless nakedness. As her skipper afterwards said, his sensations at the time made him familiar with the feelings of the cheese inside a mouse trap—and he didn't like it a bit.

Nor was *Chi-Chi* at all pleased with the wait that ensued, though she was completely hidden in the fog. Only eyes trained to the job could have hoped to pierce that thick screen, yet to Frazer and Collins every single detail of the ocean for the space of five hundred feet was perfectly clear. Thus it was that they were the first to see the water again commence to boil; to note that the protruding periscope was jagged at the end where it had been snapped off by the collier's keel, and that the following conning-tower bore a white-painted U 93.

"Full speed ahead," called Frazer to his engineer. The motor boat exerted to the last ounce that enormous speed which had made her so famous a winner of races in the otiose days of peace, and by the time the submarine had risen to full view, was dead astern of her.

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"She's still blind," quoth the lieutenant. "She'll have to open her conning-tower before she can see anything, and that's where we'll get her. Hallo, the collier's disobeying orders, and he'll spoil everything if he's not careful. Ah! I expected as much."

A door on the submarine's whaleback had suddenly opened upwards; a deadly-looking four-inch gun had sprung, mushroom fashion, from its recessed bed, and in the twinkling of an eyelid had fired pointblank at the *Makindu*, who, her nose cocked in the air, was heading for it at full speed. The submarine, still firing, slipped ahead and allowed the clumsy collier to pass him, at the same time plumping a full dozen shells into her unarmoured sides.

"Serves him right," muttered Frazer. "He should have done as I told him and left the rest to me. Anyway, if we don't want the Grand Fleet to lose its coal, we'd better make a start."

Chi-Chi turned on her heels and headed at full speed for the U-boat, who, engrossed in strafing the belligerent collier, had not as yet seen her new and puny antagonist.

Collins, his eye screwed into his sighting-

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telescope, fidgeted with his trigger, and occasionally looked imploringly at his commander.

"Not yet, Jumper," consoled the officer. "I want to catch this chap alive, if possible."

Just at that moment the unterseeboote caught sight of *Chi-Chi* and swung round her gun. But before it could fire Collins had opened the ball, and was sending round after round at the weapon, trying to totally dismount it, or, at worst, to so demoralise its crew by the constant explosion of projectiles around their heads that they could do no firing worth recording. Also, as if desirous of seeing both sides as fairly matched as possible, the fog swirled suddenly away, leaving a five-hundred-yard wide clear patch.

The tiny projectiles made a brownish cloud all around the U-boat's gun, and suddenly that vessel ceased firing. Collins, suspecting some new move, also held his hand and waited for the clouds to clear. Then he jumped and threw his cap into the air in delight.

"Holy Moses!" he chuckled. "I've drawn her teeth."

The four-inch lay on the whaleback at an awkward angle, a gash like a shark's mouth in its pedestal showing the passage of the shot which

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had dismounted it. And, all around, in various attitudes—some strained, some grotesque, but all horrible—lay the four men who had formed its crew.

“Now we’ll call alongside and receive Fritz’ surrender in the usual fashion,” remarked Frazer.

“Hard a-port.”

Before the helm could be swung over the U-boat closed her conning-tower and commenced to submerge. Frazer went almost frantic.

“Stop her, Jumper,” he yelled. “Make a sieve of her plates.”

Collins needed no second bidding—the three-pounder crackled and ejected her empty cartridge cases as fast as she could be loaded. One or two jagged holes appeared in the still visible plating of the U-boat—then, suddenly, there came a flash that redly illumined the whole surrounding fog; an explosion that crashed and reverberated like rolling thunder—then a silence. *Chi-Chi* was picked up on the crest of a huge wave caused by the sudden rending in the depths of the submarine’s whole fabric—and when she regained her balance and her even keel once more her motors refused to run. All her electric circuits

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had snapped under the sudden straining of her hull.

"What—what happened, sir?" demanded Collins. "Did she hit a mine?"

"I don't think so," replied Frazer, wiping the salt water from his face. "I rather imagine that your last round bored its way through to her torpedo tubes—I noticed you were working well forward—and it must have struck the war-head of one of the torpedoes she originally intended to fire at our pal, the fleet collier yonder. It was worse than a mine, or than anything even we've seen before—thank heaven it was painless and sudden; the Boches couldn't possibly have had time to wonder what had hit 'em."

He stood erect and yelled to the slowly approaching *Makindu*.

"Well, skipper," he remarked, when the collier drew close. "We've finished the job, and incidentally done ourselves a bit of no good. You'd better chuck a rope over for us to hitch our nose to, and lead us gently home. Don't handle us too roughly—we're really very ill, and, for the Lord's sake, don't get wandering too far out of the safe channel—here, I'll come aboard and be your pilot—or you and us will

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follow Fritz into glory—or the other place—by bringing a sharp object suddenly against a mass of packed explosive, such as lie strewn around here in the shape of mines.”

“ WITH ONE STONE ! ”

" WITH ONE STONE ! "

VI

" WITH ONE STONE ! "

THE engines in the well of His Britannic Majesty's Armed Motor Patrol Boat *Chi-Chi* coughed harshly, knocked three times as though insistently demanding immediate attention, and, with a gurgle of chuckling malice, sank into silence and immobility. Temporary Lieutenant Roderick Frazer, R.N.V.R., spat forth a profane word, and strode over to see what had gone wrong with the works.

" I expected as much," he commented bitterly as he surveyed the motors. " I told that inspecting dockyard engineer this cylinder would crack and leave us in the lurch one of these days, but of course he had to laugh at my fears and declare that, as far as he could see, there was nothing wrong with it. I wish I had him here for an hour, anyway. I'd provide him with a bit of work."

" Collins," he called, raising his voice.

An oilskin-clad figure raised itself in the boat's

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bows. This was Collins—"Jumper" of that ilk, the only real Navy-man among *Chi-Chi's* crew of six, and an expert with the Vickers semi-automatic which peered over her slim bows. He raised a hand in acknowledgment of the hail.

"In that third ammunition box from the far end of the bows you'll find a spare cylinder," went on Roderick. "Pass it aft, please."

The petty officer turned and rummaged under the forecastle, and presently emerged with the required piece of mechanism in his hand.

"I didn't know we had one of these, sir," he commented.

"Nor did the inspecting engineer," responded Frazer. "I had to camouflage it as a box of three-pounder shells or he'd have confiscated it, and we'd have been fairly in the cart at this minute. Keep an eye lifting; I'm going to be busy for a little while."

"And so am I, by all that's holy!" ejaculated Collins, jumping to the forecastle and wrenching the canvas from the three-pounder. "Here comes a Fritz to pay us a call."

Even as he spoke a long, low grey whaleback thrust itself above the surface of the sea, flung back a hatch on its upper part, and exhibited a

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business-like gun. Before Collins could snap home his own breech on a full round the U-boat's gun spoke harshly and insistently, calling for an explanation of the motor boat's presence in waters so far removed from her base. Jumper wasted no time in words, but pressed trigger, though he knew the range was overlong for the three-pounder's carrying capabilities. As he expected, the shell plunged into the sea a couple of hundred yards short, and as the U-boat replied once more, her shell whistled past the gunlayer's ears.

Frazer straightened his back, and took in the scene in an instant. Then, with a curse, he set to work replacing the cracked cylinder once more.

“ If we could only move, just for five minutes, I'd teach you manners, Fritz,” muttered Collins, as he pumped shell through his gun as fast as his loaders could cram them in. “ As it is, you've got a rotten gunlayer—he can't shoot for nuts, or he'd have punched a standing target like this to bits with his first ten rounds. That's right ; come a bit closer, and I'll show you how the thing's done.”

As if conscious of his words, the U-boat closed the range, firing as she came. One of her shells

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plumped fair and square on the motor boat's deck, tearing up the planking, but the angle of impact was too great for its fuze to be affected, and Collins kicked it overboard before it exploded.

"Got you!" snapped the gunlayer, after a strenuous burst of firing. "How's that for a bull?"

A figure on the U-boat's conning tower slowly spun round and fell crashing overboard, and two minutes later the barking four-inch disappeared behind a cloud of smoke as half a dozen of Collins's projectiles arrived and burst on its mounting in quick succession. The unterseeboote waited for no more, but closed its hatch like an oyster and, gathering in the wounded gun-crew but leaving the dismantled weapon sticking out, slid below the surface.

"And that's that!" remarked Collins. "I thought you'd bitten off a little more than you could chew, Fritz, me lad; even though our blessed old tin kettles of engines haven't got a turn in 'em."

"Collins," remarked Frazer, wiping his hands on his trousers, "you may be a good shot, but you're a rotten critic of propelling machinery. If

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it interests you, may I state that *Chi-Chi*'s motors are now as good as ever, and, just to prove it, we'll go in chase of your unterseeboote pal, after committing the carcass of the old cylinder to the deep with full military honours."

Chi-Chi shivered and trembled as she felt the thrust of her screws once more, but the repair held. Not for nothing had Frazer run and tinkered up this boat during the long otiose years of peace ; not for nothing had he piled up on his sideboard masses of silver in the shape of cups and trophies, nor sported more winning pennants than any other motor boat owner on the South Coast. He was both navigator and engineer, and what he didn't know about marine motors and marine motoring wasn't worth recording.

But, though the motor boat searched over every inch of the adjacent sea for the next three hours, she found nothing in the way of a periscope or a lurking U-boat, and when the fog rolled up heavy and thick late in the afternoon, Frazer was just on the point of giving up the hunt.

" This is bad," he said calmly. " Bad for us—worse for Fritz. But it gives us a chance of running unseen for one of those islands off the North German coast which are usually in great

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demand as U-boat bases, and I'm minded to have a bit of sport smoking one out. Starboard ten; 'midships; steady."

Like an arrow from a bow *Chi-Chi* sped through the water at her full forty knots, the grey seas leaping to meet her and lapping over the twin sets of picket-boat dropping gear, each containing an efficient fourteen-inch torpedo, which cluttered her narrow decks. In any other seas such a speed in a thick fog would have been exceedingly dangerous; even here there was always the chance of running full tilt against the whaleback of some submarine lying awash; but, though Frazer was well aware of the risks he ran, he relied upon the keen eyes of his look-outs to warn him of any obstacle in sufficient time to allow *Chi-Chi*—always a sweet steering craft—to sheer well clear of it. But, for all she saw or heard during her hundred-mile rush southward, *Chi-Chi* might have been the sole surviving vessel in a grey-cloaked universe of waters.

Evening was drawing on when her objective loomed faintly ahead, and her chattering motors slowed. The moon rose above, but its beams were powerless to penetrate the thick vapour, though rendering them dimly luminous. Yet the

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light was sufficient to show Frazer that he had fetched up under the lee of one of those small islands which form Germany's northern bulwark, and at a spot where U-boats and such small craft might reasonably be expected to pass on their way either to or from the Elbe or Zeebrugge.

“ We'll be well out of sight here, I think,” said Roderick, as *Chi-Chi's* anchor rattled down to the mud bed. “ But, all the same, we'll post look-outs before going to supper. Collins, you'd better take the first watch ; keep your eyes skinned, for we don't want to be surprised.”

But though Collins—and, in their turn, all the other hands—stared into the fog till their eyes ached, they saw absolutely nothing for three long hours. Then there came through the thick atmosphere the unmistakable sound of some surface craft's engines, thudding away at a slow rate.

“ Keep silence,” hissed Frazer. “ Get to your posts and stand by. No firing till I give the order ; we want to see the size and make of our opponent before rushing into danger.”

Chi-Chi's half-dozen wormed their way as noiselessly as snakes to their respective stations ; the faint click of the breechblock as Collins loaded

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his pet ; the snick of the Maxim lock as Weekes slid a full belt into the weapon, and the faint rasp of the dropping gear's withdrawn safety pins came as detached sounds in that silent atmosphere. The engineer thrust in his clutch as the gunlayer unscrewed the shackle of the cable, and, having attached a buoy thereto, lowered it gently into the water. But, though all was ready, though Frazer stood at the tiny wheel ready to con his vessel in any required direction at a second's notice, the approaching vessel had not as yet appeared in the fog, though the thudding of her engines grew momentarily louder and louder.

Suddenly, above the upper edge of the fog bank, Frazer saw the tips of two slender masts, raked at a degree unusual in anything but torpedo craft. Then, even as he looked, the fog swirled and lifted for a second, and in the clear patch appeared the figure of a small torpedo boat towing a submarine whose conning-tower was deserted, and from whose whaleback a four-inch gun on a shell-wrecked mounting pointed an aggressive snout towards the sky.

"Crumbs," muttered Frazer. "It's our pal of this morning, with her big sister holding her hand and leading her home. Seems to me a

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case where *Chi-Chi* takes a part ; but before opening fire we'll reconnoitre, and see what the torpedo boat possesses in the way of guns."

Silently, at Frazer's nod, the engineer slid in the clutch, and the boat moved forward at a cautious crawl in the direction where the enemy had last been seen. The fog swirled round her and parted to give her gangway ; but she saw nothing, heard nothing, but the thud-thud of the torpedo boat's engines, and the shouted guttural orders passed among her crew.

Then, quite suddenly, Frazer was aware of a black wall that loomed above him, and acted on the instant.

" Full ahead," he snapped.

The engineer shoved his lever right over ; *Chi-Chi* shook herself and bounded forward, evidently intending to immolate herself on the hull of the enemy. Frazer dropped his wheel for a second, and placed his hand on a lever. There followed a splash, a jerk of the dropping gear—and *Chi-Chi* spun on her heels as the torpedo, waterborne, and with its twin screws revolving madly, hurtled forward to its target.

Startlingly the fog split to the very heavens in a vivid crimson tongue of flame ; a thunderous

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explosion tore the opaque silence to shreds. Then the stillness fell again for a moment till the German's guns began to bark, scattering shell in all directions in the last moments of her career in the hope of taking to Valhalla whatever craft might have dealt the unseen death blow. But *Chi-Chi* remained unhit, though she passed through a veritable inferno as she again headed back, Frazer's hand on the port dropping gear, ready to discharge his second torpedo at the hull of the already damaged U-boat.

But that torpedo was never fired. Even as *Chi-Chi* came within sight of the torpedo boat, that craft lifted her stern into the fog-laden air, waved it for a second at the full moon, and then slid downwards to the ocean bed—dragging after her, at the end of its wire hawser, the unterseeboote in tow.

Frazer mopped his brow, and quite nonchalantly slipped the safety pin back into the port dropping gear.

"And that's the end," he said. "We'll cast about and pick up our anchor and any survivors, and afterwards ferry 'em to England and internment, if we can find our way home in this blanket-like atmosphere. Anyway, Fritz'll soon

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be sending out some ship or other to investigate that explosion, so we'll clear—and won't the Chief Torpedo Store Officer be pleased when he learns that *Chi-Chi's* learnt a new dodge ; that of strafing two Hun birds with one stone.”

THE BUMP OF VENERATION

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VII

THE BUMP OF VENERATION

It may have been wholly due to a fortuitous freak of chance, or Destiny—the fore-ordained fate of a certain German unterseeboote—may have ruled the game after all. The question will provide subject matter for a long debate on some wet winter evening to those interested in such things ; as for me, I simply tell the story as it happened.

Anyway, it was no chance that brought His Britannic Majesty's Armed Motor Patrol Boat *Chi-Chi* to the dockyard at Portsmouth for repairs, and it was certainly the official sense of orderliness that placed her on the repair slip alongside the United States Ship " M. L. 303 "—the M.L. being the shortened form of " Motor Launch." And, such being the case, it was only natural that Temporary Lieutenant Roderick Frazer—*Chi-Chi*'s peace-time owner and present (war-time) commander—should play the host to Lieutenant Cyrus P. Vanderbell, the captain of the motor launch aforesaid.

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Being of about the same age, both sportsmen and both hunters of the predatory U-boat, they had much in common, and Frazer found a sheer delight in introducing to his *confrère* the "lions" of Portsmouth Town, Dockyard, and Harbour. They had spent a pleasant month together; Vanderbell had been duly impressed with the beauty of the Town Hall—and the other beauties of the Church Parade. He had worked off many admiring adjectives anent the resources of the dockyards, and exclaimed immensely at the dimensions and obvious power of the latest British Dreadnought battleships he had been allowed to visit; the gunnery school and the vast naval barracks had moved his innermost soul, and the naval atmosphere that permeates the famous base had at length entered into and soaked his whole being.

And, to crown all the other things, Frazer at length acted as Vanderbell's cicerone over H.M.S. *Victory*, thereby giving the American some little insight into the spirit and tradition by which the British Navy is swayed and controlled in war and peace.

"Funny thing," remarked Frazer, as the pair stood at the gangway. "I never see this old

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hooker without wanting to take off my cap to her. I suppose I must have the bump of veneration rather strongly developed—somehow, she seems to typify for me all the traditions of the sea, adherence to which has made our Fleet the best in the world. I can feel the very spirit of Nelson in the atmosphere aboard here, and after I leave I seem to be cleaner, sanctified, as it were, by the mere contact with this old relic of the past.”

He laughed half-shamefacedly, as grown men will when caught in a sentimental mood, but there was no denying the fact that Frazer—in common with all pukka navymen—held Nelson’s old flagship in a kind of sacred awe and admiration. The American, however, did not scoff at the outburst of feeling ; he only rubbed his chin and looked reminiscent.

“ Yes ; I understand,” he observed at length. “ And it’s a grand feeling to have, too. Now we’ve got nothing like this in our navy—we’re only babies on the seas compared with you folks—and I can’t help thinking how fine these traditions are. They make you turn out the biggest and best battleships, and send the right type of men to fight them ; the traditions that follow on having a Sea-Mother like the *Victory* make you all

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work like demons—from the biggest to the smallest—make you run *Chi-Chi* at a higher speed than anything else on the waters; make you tickle Fritz for the love of the thing—just because your naval traditions handed down from Nelson—say that you must always tickle the enemy wherever he may be found.”

“That’s just it,” agreed Roderick. “We must fight and work and play in certain ways because they’re the best—because they’re hallowed by traditional association—that’s why we always go ‘all out’—that’s why there’s no craft on the seven seas that can move faster than *Chi-Chi* when I like to ask for her best speed.”

“I’m not quite so sure of that,” interpolated the American. “I’ve got a hunch that my little hooker could show her a clean pair of heels under equal conditions. She’s no slouch, you know.”

Frazer knew well enough; knew that M.L. 303 was known as the best of the American submarine chasers; was nicknamed “rifle bullet” from the fact that her number was the same as that of the bullet fired from the Service rifle, and, like that bullet, she was of high velocity and penetrative power and accurate direction, as many U-boats had found to their cost; though “The Slick ‘un”

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was the cognomen that always stuck to her. He knew that her speed was immensely high—she had been designed especially for slickness—and that, as yet, figures regarding this speed were not available. Yet he knew also that in peace-time *Chi-Chi* had never tasted defeat in any of the hard-fought races at regattas which had piled so much silver upon his sideboard and entitled him to hoist more winning pennants than the small collapsible wireless mast could comfortably hold. And, furthermore, that traditional pride in his seamanship and boat-handling he had so lately spoken of was now—half tentatively, it is true—challenged, and he was disposed to take up the gauntlet so nonchalantly flung down.

“No,” he admitted, “303’s no slouch, as you say, yet I’m inclined to think *Chi-Chi* could beat her. If there was the slightest opportunity we’d try the matter out in a friendly way, but being war time, I’m afraid there won’t be any chance. So, that being the case, I rather think we shall have to each consider his own boat the fastest.”

The American nodded.

“That’s so,” he agreed. “Well, we’ll get back aboard if there’s nothing else to see, and

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fight each other over a game of poker this evening in my cabin. Come early—I discovered a new brand of whisky this morning, and I'd like to hear your opinion of it."

Frazer went over, a new light in his eyes.

"I've got my sailing orders," he announced, waving a sheet of parchment. "I'm to do steam trials on Thursday and clear for sea on Friday morning. Wish me luck, old chap."

"I do—heartily," came the reply. "But, funnily enough, I've got my orders too, and my programme's identical with yours."

Roderick brought his fist to the table with a bang.

"I have it," he cried. "We'll carry out those orders to the very letter—and we'll have our race at the same time. From the Nab Lightship to No Man's Fort is exactly seven miles of a straight course. When we're doing our trials we'll steer on that course, and settle the question of the speediest boat once and for all. Do you agree?"

"Sure—I agree right now," responded the other. "Here, have a glass and drink to the race." He filled two tumblers. "Here's cheerio, and may the best boat win."

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They drank in silence, each holding the other's eyes, and then, dismissing all thoughts of poker, fell to discussing arrangements for the coming contest. And so it came about that when Frazer rose to return to his own ship the whole scheme was cut and dried, and only required the advent of Thursday for complete fruition.

Chi-Chi took the water next morning, and in the seclusion of the well where the motors had their home, Frazer told his crew of half a dozen all about the planned contest. Being British—and therefore sportsmen—they immediately entered into the plan with full zest ; doing everything possible to ensure victory for their craft. And, not a mile away, six Americans were toiling in exactly the same manner.

Being war-vessels, both boats had to race whilst carrying full equipment ; *Chi-Chi's* fore-castle three-pounder—a Vickers semi-automatic of pukka Navy pattern—was balanced by “ The Slick 'un's ” gun ; both vessels mounted brass-jacketed Maxims astern ; both had their somewhat cramped decks cluttered with twin sets of picket boat dropping gear, each set carrying a brand new, highly-efficient fourteen-inch torpedo ; both possessed miniature searchlights

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and tiny wireless installations in eleven-pound boxes. Conditions, therefore, were exactly equal ; neither boat had the advantage of the other.

Thursday morning dawned fresh and fair, and, as the two boats moved at easy speed towards Spithead, there suddenly came on the morning air a dull shuddering boom.

“ What’s that ? ” demanded “ Jumper ” Collins — *Chi-Chi*’s expert gunlayer, and the only pukka Navy man among her crew.

Frazer shaded his eyes with his hand.

“ Sounded like a mine,” he said. “ And, by the look of that old hooker there, it was a mine.”

He pointed to where an elderly, rusty coasting steamer—apparently, from the flag at her foremasthead, having been examined and found guiltless of contraband—was slowly settling down by the head to eventually rest on one of the shoals of Portsmouth Harbour. Half a dozen steam picket boats were already hastening to her assistance, so Frazer and Vanderbell deemed it unnecessary to alter course in order to rescue her crew.

“ Strange, though,” ruminated Frazer, as he watched the taking off of her company. “ But there aren’t supposed to be any mines just there,

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according to the chart. One must have broken adrift from its moorings and strafed her ; anyway, she's certainly got all that's coming to her, and doesn't seem to appreciate it much, either."

He was roused from his cogitations by the American's shout, and turned to discover the Nab Lightship abeam. In accordance with the pre-arranged plan, he slewed and stopped the boat with her stem-piece exactly in line with that of the bobbing light-vessel, while 303 ranged herself alongside.

" Ready ? " called Roderick.

The engineers of both vessels crouched with their hands on regulating valves, ready to throw them fully open at the next word. Vanderbell nodded.

" Stand by ! " continued the lieutenant.
" Go ! "

Both sets of motors simultaneously commenced to chatter and throb ; the fabric of both craft shook under the vibration. Both boats lifted their noses slightly and sat down upon their sterns—but even then the grey water came over their forecastles in sheets, and, streaming into the wells, was thrust outboard once more by the action of the tiny pumps. The crews lay flat

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or crouched in odd corners where they would offer no wind-resistance ; the naked guns shone and glinted in the sunlight, for their covers had been removed so as not to impede in the slightest the headlong progress. And, at the wheel of each vessel, with his eyes fixed on the fort which was the winning post, stood each commander.

At first there was nothing between the two ships—303 sped like her namesake straight ahead at the rate of forty-five knots per hour ; exactly abeam, and keeping station as though invisibly connected, *Chi-Chi* ate up the distance at precisely the same speed.

Then, after a mile had been covered ; after each engineer had tried to coax his motors to just another revolution per minute, Frazer commenced to try the tactics which had won him so many races. He nursed *Chi-Chi* quietly over a stretch of broken water ; he slammed her all out over a patch no rougher than a millpond, and at the end of the second mile *Chi-Chi's* stem was exactly a foot ahead of the opponent's.

Vanderbell, too, being an expert at his job, employed tactics in his own way. He eased his engines for just three seconds and then slammed his valves right open ; his fingers roaming among

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the stops studding the rim of his steering wheel. But *Chi-Chi* had taken advantage of that three seconds to spurt herself, and was now half a length ahead. Vanderbell made frantic efforts to catch and pass her, but at the end of the third mile he had only gained half a dozen inches. The boats passed the fourth milestone in precisely the same position, and as the fifth one approached each set his teeth and called on his boat for the supreme effort. Then *Chi-Chi*'s reputation and Frazer's racing skill began to count. Slowly, surely, she drew ahead till her rudder was in line with 303's gun; till daylight showed between her stern and the American's bows.

Then, quite suddenly, Frazer did a curious thing. He spun his wheel hard over and *Chi-Chi*, still racing on at breakneck speed, slewed on her stern and cast off at right angles to her original course, heading straight for the rusty tramp who had, that very morning, struck a mine and settled to rest on the shoal.

"Collins—the gun, quick!" cried Frazer. "Get her loaded."

The naval petty officer came from his place with a question in his eyes, but Frazer was far too busy with his wheel to talk. So the question

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passed unanswered. The breech snicked open, a full round was inserted, and then, clinging precariously to his shoulder piece, Collins stood by for further orders.

"Weekes," called Frazer.

"Sir," said a red-haired Cockney.

"Stand by the dropping gear on the port side," ordered the lieutenant. "Set the torpedo to run at fifteen feet, and when I give the word for the Lord's sake let go without delay."

Weekes's eyes also assumed a questioning look, but he said nothing. He knelt and fixed the gear while the rushing water streamed around his knees and wrists, and at last reported the torpedo ready and adjusted. Then he, too, clung on at his post and awaited orders.

Meanwhile the American boat had made the most of her antagonist's sudden shift of course, and, having completed her distance, lay waiting for *Chi-Chi* off the Fort. Frazer took his craft round her in a circle, still going at full speed.

"Go and look after that wreck, please," he ordered. "She's up to no good; and if you see anything suspicious plug her first and ask questions afterwards."

He had no time for further explanation, but

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sped off up harbour again. Picket boats saw him coming and slid out of his way ; once *Chi-Chi* had to pull herself round smartly to avoid cutting down a pulling cutter, but she never slackened speed.

"Stand by, Weekes," called Frazer, as the ancient bulk of the *Victory* loomed within two thousand yards.

Weekes grabbed the lanyard of the dropping gear.

"*Leggo!*" yelled the lieutenant.

The torpedo took the water with a splash, shook itself with maddening leisureliness, and then, dipping down its nose, fell to its set depth and commenced to speed onwards. *Chi-Chi* shot off to starboard and then circled inwards again. Frazer shut off speed and silently watched the sea.

Suddenly there appeared a gout of grey water, followed by a dull red burst of flame, on the outer edges of which were black specks of varying shape and size. Then a shuddering explosion rent the air to shreds and the water fell back. . . . Temporary Lieutenant Roderick Frazer, R.N.V.R., reverently removed his cap as a broad patch of oil came and slowly spread itself on the surface of the harbour waters—spread until its mingling colours

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fretted around the hull of that stateliest of Britain's monuments—H.M.S. *Victory*.

* * * * *

"Say, I've won, after all." Cyrus P. Vanderbilt's voice recalled Frazer's wandering thoughts. Roderick shook his head.

"No," he said sedately. "I won—thank God!"

He caught the questioning look in his late opponent's eye and smiled softly.

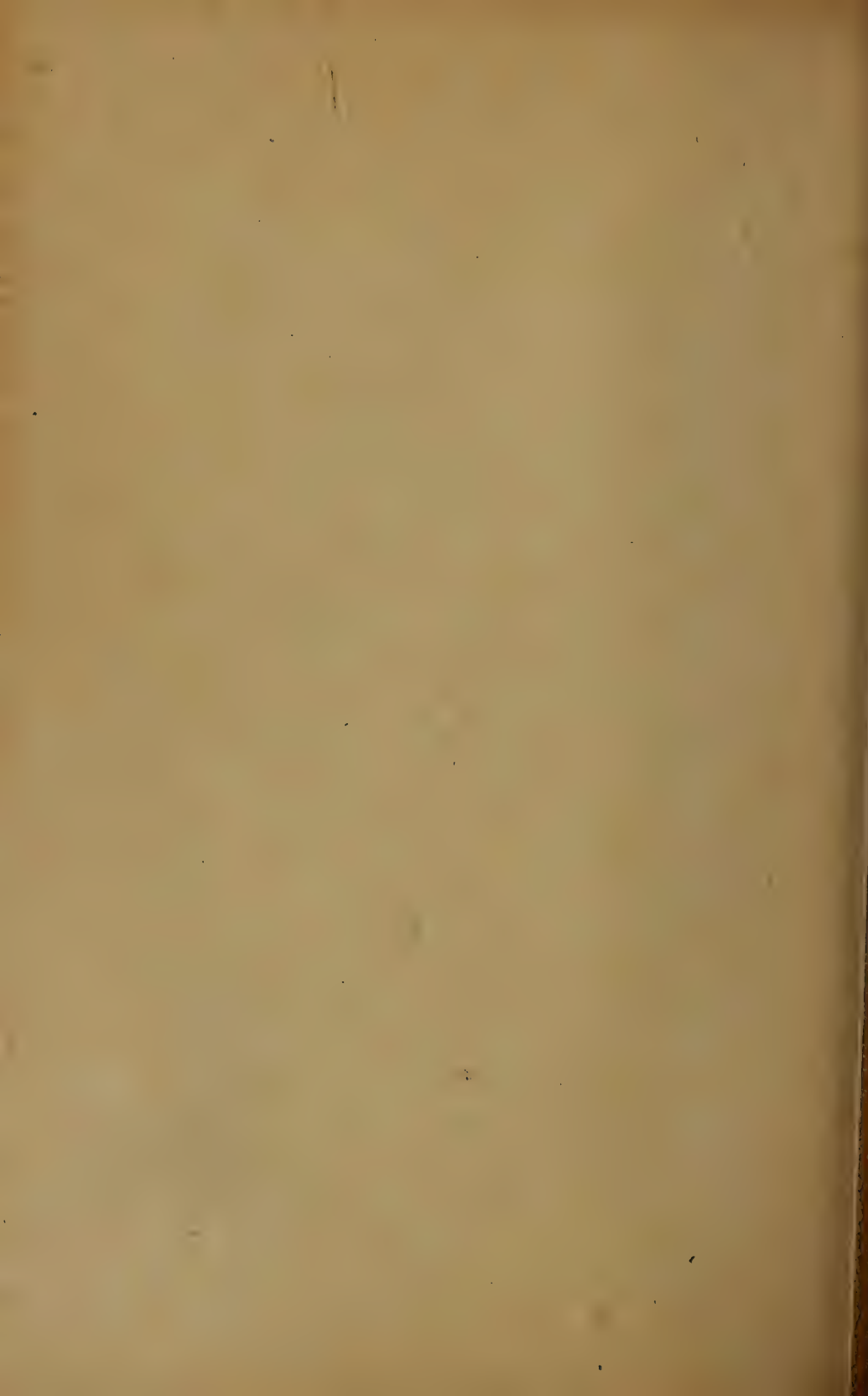
"Listen," he said. "This morning when that tramp met with her mishap I wondered how she'd come to be mined in a place where there is a free channel. I happened to remember the wondering when we were approaching her, and looked involuntarily in her direction. I was just in time to see the tip of an unmistakable periscope diving below the surface, and knowing that none of our boats come into this harbour except on the top, I immediately guessed it was a Fritz. As we came along over the fifth mile I saw the track of the periscope well out this way, and it immediately struck me what she intended to do. So I chased after her, abandoning the race—and I won. I reckon my torpedo must have

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caught her clean amidships—she'd never know what hit her—but if I hadn't happened to see her the Boche would have performed the same kind of act for the Navy as he did for the towns of Louvain, Rheims, Ypres, when he destroyed their sacred buildings—he'd have slapped a torpedo into our greatest national monument, into the Mother of Navies, the old *Victory*."

"I wondered why you scooted off so suddenly," answered the American. "And now I understand how you won."

"Yes," laughed Roderick, replacing his cap. "I won, as I said—though perhaps not exactly in the way we'd planned. Never mind—we'll have another race some day, and then, maybe, I shan't have any occasion to overrule my sporting instincts through the possession of a well-developed bump of veneration."



THE LION AND THE MOUSE



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VIII

THE LION AND THE MOUSE

"You'll engage her, of course." Petty Officer "Jumper" Collins's face was a mask; only the eager glint peering from his eyes betrayed the blood-lust eating his soul. Temporary Lieutenant Roderick Frazer, R.N.V.R., captain of His Britannic Majesty's Armed Motor Patrol Boat *Chi-Chi*, turned, a whimsical smile creasing the corners of his mouth.

"We've never run away from a scrap yet, Collins," he said, "and I don't think this will be any exception to the general rule. And, as this chap is big enough to hoist us in, you'd better clear away your gun and stand by."

Afar off the unmistakable form of an enemy torpedo boat could be seen bearing down upon the little motor craft at high speed, her course converging on *Chi-Chi*'s own. Occasionally the short, choppy sea rose up and beat against her, as though intent on delaying the moment when she should annihilate the little motor boat; it

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seemed, indeed, as though the waters fought on the side of the weaker vessel.

"She's making heavy weather of it, too," muttered Roderick. "That'll give us a better chance, for she can't be a very stable gun-platform in this sea; and as for slamming a torpedo into us—well, she couldn't do it if we were stopped and willing to receive such an inconvenient present."

Petty Officer Collins, the only pukka fighting man among *Chi-Chi's* crew of six, flung a report into the teeth of the gale.

"Cleared away, sir," he called.

Frazer nodded, took a glance at the lean muzzle of the Vickers semi-automatic three-pounder peering over *Chi-Chi's* bows; flung a glance astern at the perky little brass-jacketed Maxim which was the boat's only other gun, and grinned.

"Maybe we shall do the torpedoing, if there's the least opportunity," he exclaimed. "Weekes, clear away the dropping gear."

The seaman bent to the tong-like apparatus which cluttered *Chi-Chi's* narrow deck, and cast loose ropes here and there. When he had finished, the glistening shapes of a pair of

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fourteen-inch torpedoes showed ready for any sudden call.

Boom! The torpedo boat fired her ranging-gun, a twelve-pounder perched on her forecastle. But the shot went high and pitched into the sea a good fifty yards past the labouring motor boat.

"That's a rotten one, if you like," muttered Collins to the couple of men who formed his gun crew. "Wait till the range narrows; I'll show 'em how to shoot in heavy weather."

Chi-Chi, instead of boring her nose into the oncoming seas as the torpedo boat did, rode each successive wave like a duck, being plain in sight of the enemy's gunlayers at one moment, and the next completely hidden by the mountains of water rolling rapidly across the face of the ocean. Also, having the current astern, she was comparatively dry, whereas a film of scurrying wetness swirled hither and thither across her adversary's decks, and handicapped her shooting all the more.

"You can commence as soon as you like, Collins." Frazer was now the steel-cold man of action. "But, please, don't waste any more ammunition than is necessary. We're likely to

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want all we can muster before we get out of this little scrimmage."

The three-pounder barked snappishly, Collins watching for the spout of spume which should indicate the shell's falling. It appeared dead in line with the torpedo-boat's bows, but some hundred yards ahead of her.

"Right a little," muttered "Jumper" to himself, adjusting his sight. "Stand by, you two, for a burst of rapid."

He bent once more, and the three-pounder barked aggressively for a full minute. Through his sights Collins could see the little brown clouds where his shells exploded. He was firing at the enemy's bridge, his object being to put her steering-gear out of action, so that she must perforce heave-to while her alternative wheel was connected, during which period opportunity might be found for the discharge of a torpedo from the dropping gear.

But the enemy was having something to say in the matter. That forecastle four-pounder had now almost found the range, and every time *Chi-Chi* appeared in sight he dropped whistling shells into the seas all around. Some ricocheted upwards and went spinning into the harmless

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distance ; others burst close at hand, and deluged the gun crew with upflung showers of spray.

" A wet shirt—and no fish ! " observed Collins at one such time. " Here's your shell back, Fritz, and you're welcome to it."

Collins was suddenly conscious of a hot burst of flame exactly in front of his sights ; something excruciatingly hot tore across his forehead and through his left shoulder, and he felt himself falling through space. Then, after an interval which seemed like an eternity, he struck the bottom of the world—it was really the well where *Chi-Chi's* motors had their purring being—and a drop of molten lava hove itself from out of chaos and settled on his cheek.

" Who the hell—— ? " Collins raised himself on his elbow. Through the turmoil of the storm, the gun firing, and the clatter of the motors close at hand, " Jumper " felt something like warm milk stealing over his eyes ; he raised a hand and dashed the stuff away. Then, stupidly and wonderingly, he gazed at the back of that hand.

" My God ! " he muttered. " Blood ! "

He jumped to his feet like one possessed, gazed wildly around, and then, with a bitter oath, clambered back to *Chi-Chi's* heaving forecastle.

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With exceeding roughness he grasped at the shoulder of his lieutenant, who, as soon as his gunlayer had gone, had left his post aft and brought the three-pounder into action once more.

"Here, out of this," snapped the seaman. "I owe those blighters something—and it's my gun."

Frazer replied never a word; one glance at the berserk petty officer was enough. The next minute Collins was firing with the strange coolness of insanity, while the lieutenant thrust cartridge after cartridge into the self-opening breech as the gun recoiled.

Closer and closer came the enemy, and now her twelve-pounders found the exact range. Their spaces of destruction were limited by the period during which the *Chi-Chi* was in sight, but they made the most of them. One shell came along and ripped the port dropping gear right out from its sockets, a second took the brass-jacketed Maxim clean overboard, and a third exploded clean above the centre of the boat. Weekes spun round with a queer, choking cry, the heavens seemed to open, and Frazer dropped to the deck.

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Again Collins felt that burst of hot metal, again the sudden hot thrust of a sliver permeated his body, and again that gush of lukewarm fluid spread itself, this time down his broad back.

"Damn!" he snapped, not because of the pain of his new wound, but because the three-pounder breechblock suddenly jammed. "Now we are done."

A fountain of water arose under *Chi-Chi's* bows; the thunder of universes pealed out above her once more; and her motors, with a sudden, gasping cry of almost human pain, ceased their purring. *Chi-Chi* was taking the count.

Then, out of pandemonium, came a louder report than ever. Then another, and another, till the loudness was as a continuous roll. Collins raised himself on his elbow and gazed ahead just as a wave lifted the boat to its crest.

"Gosh!" he muttered. "It is the end of the world."

For some obscure reason, a great fan-shaped gout of flame rose from between the torpedo boat's funnels; a long, thunderous crash ensued, and, before the gunlayer's eyes, the enemy broke clean across the middle, and sank before a single hand could save himself. Thereafter there was

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naught but darkness in the world for Collins and for the rest of *Chi-Chi*'s half-dozen.

* * * * *

Frazer opened his eyes and gazed blankly around him. White enamelled walls, with here and there an unframed photograph pasted on them; a trim steel bedstead, with scrupulously neat bedding; a small steel table, with a bottle and a tumbler upon it and a red baize curtain over a doorway. Then the curtain lifted, and a man in the uniform of a surgeon, Royal Navy, entered.

"Hallo, old man!" he said heartily. "You've decided to wake up, then?"

Frazer smiled a wan smile. "How did I get here?" he demanded, in a voice just a trifle better than a whisper.

"Oh—usual way, you know," returned the other. "Tackle from a davit and a bamboo stretcher. We hoisted in all your other hands that way, too; and we'd have hoisted in your boat, but that we hadn't a stretcher big enough for her."

And an amused twinkle showed in the doctor's eye for a moment.

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“ They’re all safe, then ? ” demanded Roderick.
“ You’ve got the whole half-dozen of us ? ”

“ The whole lot — though you’ve usurped all the best cabins in the ship,” was the answer.

“ I hate to seem ungrateful, old man,” mused Roderick, after a space ; “ but I do wish you’d managed to save *Chi-Chi* as well.”

“ How you love that boat ! ” exclaimed the surgeon. “ You’ve done nothing but chant her praises since you’ve been here—and, if it’s any news to you, I may say she’s perched up on our boat-deck, and our shipwrights and artificers are working wonders on her. She’ll be patched up long before you are, anyhow.”

“ By the way,” continued the man of medicine. “ You ought to be jolly thankful we came up when we did, and strafed that torpedo boat. She was much bigger than you, you know, and I really can’t understand why you engaged her. We managed to find her with the first few salvoes, or she’d have blown you completely out of the water.”

“ That’s all right, old chap ; I am grateful,” retorted Frazer. “ As for the wisdom of fighting the torpedo boat—well, *Chi-Chi* has never yet

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refused a scrap, and that was no exception to the rule."

"Oh, I see," answered the surgeon. "And now you'd better have a drink of this, and get some sleep. You'll be as right as rain in a few days."

* * * * *

II

"More dirty weather," snapped Temporary Lieutenant Roderick Frazer, waving a hand at the serried masses of black clouds that scudded across the sky. "The sea's about as high as I've ever seen it; the wind's enough to slice you in halves; and, unless I'm a rotten judge, we shall have a decent drop of rain before long, just to make matters more uncomfortable."

The armed motor patrol boat *Chi-Chi* hunched herself to the waves which rolled across the Bight of Heligoland, taking them green across her low forecastle. Three months had elapsed since her scrap with the torpedo boat; three months during which an efficient hospital had mended her men, as an efficient dockyard had made her hull and fittings ready for service once more. A

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brand new three-pounder semi-automatic Vickers gun now decorated her forecastle, the latest thing in Maxims flaunted its brassy jacket above her sternpost, while a pair of regulation sets of torpedo-dropping gear held as many shimmering fourteen-inch torpedoes on each side of her. And, being a part of that sure shield to whom the defence of the Island Empire is entrusted, she was at her post as usual, doing her work as though she had never fought against long odds in her life.

Petty Officer "Jumper" Collins—with a parti-coloured ribbon now decorating his left breast—was back with his old pet; the half-dozen were the identical men who had brought *Chi-Chi* to the service of her country when the otiose days of peace gave place to the strenuous times of war; her jobs were just as many and as varied as ever and she hailed each with the eagerness that is characteristic of the motor-boat patrols.

"Thunder in that little lot too, sir," remarked Collins, as he followed his officer's gaze skywards. "And we'll catch it hot."

He was right. As *Chi-Chi* clove her headlong way through the seas the artillery of the gods suddenly came into action at long range. The

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lightning split the heavens with long, jagged cracks, and it was as though an illuminated world peered through. The thunder crashed and rolled, and then, relief of reliefs, the rain descended in sheets. The huge drops stung where they fell; the sea gouted into millions of tiny fountains; *Chi-Chi* started her miniature pump to keep under the water which collected inside her frail hull. Then, gradually, the long, rolling waves were beaten almost flat by the force of the downpour; and though discomfort came from the rain, there was little discomfort in the boat's easy motion over the flattened seas.

Suddenly a peal of thunder broke like the discharge of a million guns directly above the motor boat, and the air grew black as night as the low-lying clouds piled themselves in colossal masses. Then, instead of dying away as its predecessors had died, the roll of the thunder seemed to continue intermittently for some time, though its location appeared to be many miles ahead.

Collins stiffened, his expert gunnery ear detecting a note woven into the clamour of the storm.

"That's guns, sir," he said to the lieutenant.

Frazer listened with all his ears. "Nonsense!"

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he snapped. "Who the dickens is likely to be firing in this weather?"

"That's guns, all the same, sir," repeated Collins, with double assurance.

"Well, just to satisfy you, we'll cast off to the north and investigate," replied Roderick, though he was openly sceptical.

The motors increased their purring to a loud hum; *Chi-Chi* sliced through the rain-sheets and the darkness as though she were contesting a close finish to a motor-boat race. Presently the long, low reverberations broke out afresh, still ahead; and, as if to give weight to the petty officer's opinion, the thunder proclaimed its presence at that same moment well off the beam.

"I'm rather inclined to agree with you, Jumper," remarked the officer. "It certainly seems as though firing is going on ahead, while thunder's off to port, or else it's thundering in two places at once."

Collins suddenly stiffened, and flung out a hand, pointing. "Look!" he gasped.

In the sudden momentary illumination of a flash of lightning there had appeared for a second three shapes. Then the crest of a wave lifted *Chi-Chi*, and she had the vision of a picture in

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vivid chiaroscuro—stabs of vivid crimson flame into the blackness all around ; stabs which came from three directions, one of which appeared to be stationary, while the other two seemed to be circling the first.

“ It’s a scrap,” called Collins ; “ and we’re not in it. Humphrey, coax those motors a bit, please ; we can’t afford to miss any of this.”

But the motors were already pulsing their utmost, and *Chi-Chi* could get no increase on her already enormous pace. But every second that stabbing of flame grew nearer ; every second the rolling of the guns grew louder, until Collins could, with his trained ear, almost read the story of the fight into the sounds.

“ A biggish cruiser and a couple of destroyers fighting each other,” he estimated. “ And, by the look of things as I see ’em, the cruiser’s stopped, and getting the worst of it.”

At that moment, as if to emphasise the purport of the gunlayer’s estimate, the centre of the flame-spitting figures emitted something which left a long trail of fire against the black background of the clouds, and, high in the warring heavens, burst into a series of red stars.

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"The cruiser's one of ours, sir," gasped Collins.
"Aren't you glad you came?"

"Glad?" echoed Frazer. "Clear away for action. *Chi-Chi* never refuses a scrap."

The three-pounder and the Maxim were cast loose; ropes were unshackled from the torpedo-dropping gear. Collins, Weekes, and Frazer took up their battle stations, and stood by to bear a hand as soon as possible.

As they approached they made out the figures of the combatants; it was even as "Jumper" had guessed. A big cruiser was engaged with two small torpedo craft of the enemy, but the heavy ground-swell remaining from the storm swung her this way and that helplessly, as, stopped, the torpedo boats circled her and spoiled the aiming of her guns.

"Why don't they torpedo her?" gasped Frazer.

His answer came in a flash of lightning that showed the decks of the torpedo boats swept bare; he could not know that both vessels had fired every underwater weapon they possessed, and that the explosion of one under the cruiser's screws had robbed her of the power to manœuvre—had she been able to move she could easily have disposed of her twin pigmy enemies, who

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were now only hovering around until she sank. They, of course, could not know that beyond blowing off one propeller and twisting the shaft of the other the great explosion which had mounted into the air had effected no damage; they were too intent upon their prey to have eyes for other things. That was why *Chi-Chi* managed to approach unseen.

Suddenly one of the torpedo boats stopped, gave a convulsive heave, and almost lifted bodily off the face of the waters as an ultra-efficient fourteen-inch torpedo exploded under her engine-room. Then followed a vivid flash that paled even the lightning, and a rolling explosion that put the thunder to shame.

The second torpedo boat cast about her in a panic; half her guns turned from attacking the cruiser and commenced to sweep the waters. A searchlight sprang into being, and its long arm quested up and down the seas. Then, quite suddenly, it went out like a snuffed candle as Collins found it with a three-pounder shell.

Chi-Chi crept in closer and closer, keeping pace with the racing torpedo boat. The latter, now thoroughly frightened, desired to break off the fight with the helpless cruiser and get behind

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the shelter of the nearest roadstead, where there were no enemies that suddenly cropped up and remained invisible.

But Frazer had other ideas. "Stand by that second torpedo," he called. "I'll lay you nearly alongside, and then you can let her have it. We can't afford to miss."

Chi-Chi slewed on her heel and kept pace, the loom of the torpedo boat's hull gleaming blackly to port. Suddenly—with a suddenness that made the boat literally stand on her stern—she spun round, five hundred yards away from the torpedo boat.

"Now!" yelled Frazer. The torpedo dropped into the water with a splash, its propellers twittered for a second . . . across the void came a second gout of flame, a second explosion, and then silence.

Chi-Chi, her lights showing, cruised over to the stricken cruiser.

"Ship ahoy!" called Frazer. "Can I help?"

"You've helped enough, whoever you are," came back a voice which Frazer recognised. "Thanks, awfully. But you can't do any more, unless you can tow us."

"I'm afraid that's a little beyond even our

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powers," laughed Frazer. " May I come alongside ? "

" Certainly ! Delighted to have you," was the reply. " May we ask your name ? "

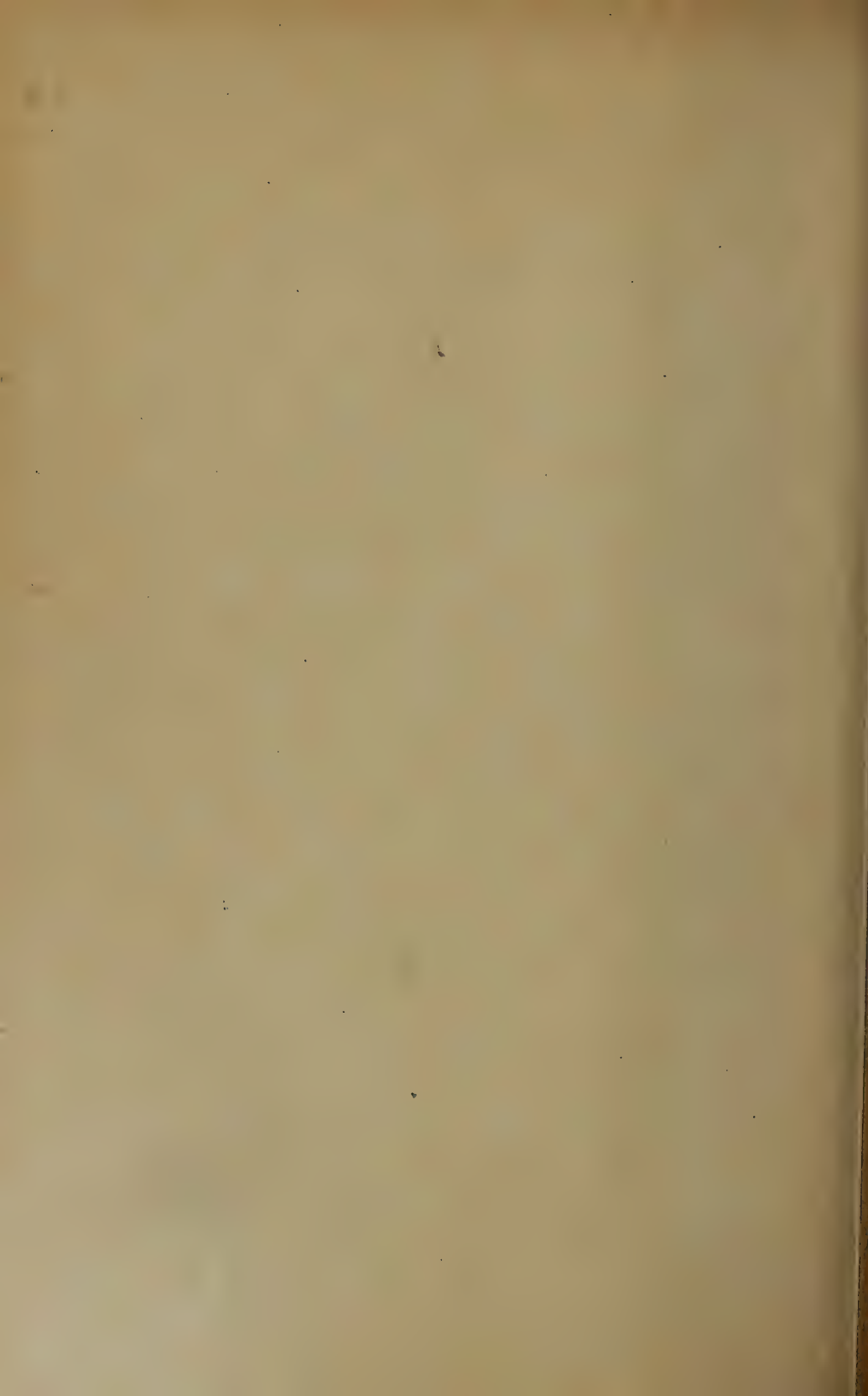
" *Chi-Chi*, armed motor boat," observed Frazer. " Who are you ? "

" Cruiser *Cardigan*, battered and broken down. Both screws blown off, I believe, by one of Fritz' torpedoes."

Frazer whistled softly, and a grin stole over his features. He conned *Chi-Chi* to the grey heaving side, and made her fast. Then he clambered to the deck. The first officer he met was the surgeon.

" Hallo, old man," Frazer cried, grasping the other's hand. " Here we are again, thanks to you and the dockyards. I say, did you ever hear that little fable about the lion and the mouse, or do you remember my telling you that *Chi-Chi* never refused a scrap or made exceptions to her rule ? "

“ FOR SERVICES RENDERED ”



" FOR SERVICES RENDERED "

IX

" FOR SERVICES RENDERED "

HIS Britannic Majesty's Motor Patrol Boat *Chi-Chi* slid sweetly over the waters of the North Sea, questing, as was her wont, for some trace of one of those strange fish termed unterseeboten, and finding—not even a whiff of paraffin or a creamy fizzing ring to indicate that such a fish was known in the scheme of things.

" Rotten job, U-boat hunting," remarked Temporary Lieutenant Roderick Frazer, *Chi-Chi's* owner and captain. " Three weeks on the job and not even the sight of a periscope, except that one we tracked the other day and which, after five hours' work, turned out to be one of our own. If we don't get something soon, I shall be more fed up with this than with any one of the other well-assorted jobs we've had since Kaiser Billy went dotty."

Petty Officer " Jumper " Collins—the real Navy gunlayer and the only pukka sea-fighter in *Chi-Chi's* complement of six, laughed with the abandon of one freed from discipline.

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"Keep your heart up, sir," he observed. "We'll get one in time, though we can't exactly hope to catch 'em with bits o' thread and bent pins. Hallo; what do you want?"

His last remark was addressed to a somewhat elderly paddle steamer, who, in the otiose days of peace, had been employed in ferrying passengers, at a penny per head, across the mouth of a certain river, but who now sported a dirty White Ensign at her stern in token of her being a unit in The Sure Shield which keeps watch and ward over the Island Kingdom, and over Fritz in his harbours. She had whoofed gruffly from the miniature syren on her stove-pipe funnel; had stopped her clanking paddles, and was now endeavouring to convey some message or other to the armed motor boat by means of an array of multi-coloured flags hoisted on her slim mast.

Frazer, after much searching through the pages of an unfamiliar signal book, at last read the flags as an invitation alongside.

"What does the old duck want, I wonder?" he said, as after waving a pennant in indication of the message's receipt and identification, *Chi-Chi* slewed in her stride and sped towards the ancient craft.

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" Perhaps he's got letters for us, or wants us to go to tea," remarked Collins. " Or maybe he's got our long lost brothers aboard, and is just dying to reintroduce us."

Collins might have gone on speculating for quite a long time in this strain, but just then *Chi-Chi* ran alongside the steamer's paddle box, and a figure on her bridge hailed them through a megaphone.

" Pity you weren't out here about an hour and a half back," it said—it was the *Hesperus*' skipper ; *Hesperus* being the paddle steamer's Sunday and official name. " You might have had a chance of earning a bit of that money you draw from the Government."

" How ? " demanded Frazer. " By giving you a tow ? "

The skipper snorted.

" Tow me ! " he snapped. " Why, you couldn't tow a fly out of your rum rations after it'd drunk itself to death," he scoffed. " When I want a tow I'll get a real ship to do the job, not a cockleshell like you."

Further good-humoured banter followed, but Roderick soon tired of it.

" Well, what is it you want us to do ? " he

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demanded, cutting ruthlessly into one of Collins's most stinging aspersions on the character of the skipper's maternal aunt.

"Well, if you're interested in the information," said that gentleman, after he had disposed of the gunlayer, "I don't mind telling you that one of the Fritzes is hanging about in this quarter. He slammed a torpedo into a patrol trawler quite early this morning, and I'd hardly picked her crew out of their boat before I had to perform the same kind office for the hands of a Danish coaster, who'd got a present for a good boy from a bad one, and didn't quite know what to do with it."

The skipper paused and eyed the armed motor boat.

"But I don't think it'll be quite right to send you to find him, after all," he observed, as if by way of afterthought. "He'll hoist you inboard and eat you for tea, I expect."

"We'll chance that, skipper," retorted Frazer. "Just give us the bearings of the place where the two ships got what was coming to 'em, and we'll maybe give you a drink out of the prize money when we bring Fritz home at the end of a string."

The steamer's crew looked *Chi-Chi* over for her full forty feet of length; they critically

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examined the Vickers three-pounder semi-automatic gun perched on her dinky forecastle, they pretended that the sheen of her perky little brass-jacketed after Maxim dazzled their eyes. Then they guffawed rudely and loudly.

" You've got pluck, though you are only a little 'un," at length conceded *Hesperus*' skipper. " Blest if I won't give you a chance to earn that prize money, though if Fritz hadn't crowned all his previous insults by shoving a torpedo off at me—and missing—I'm hanged if I'd do it."

" What a pity," put in Collins.

" What's a pity ? " demanded the skipper.

" That he should have missed you," replied the petty officer. " He must be a rotten shot to miss an old tub like that. Why, you can't waddle more than two knots and an onion in a week, you old Gosport liner ! "

It took Frazer twenty minutes to reduce the skipper to sweet reasonableness after that slur, but at length he managed to extract—between bursts of profanity respecting Collins's apparent ancestry, his own personal attributes and the fate still in store for him—the necessary information, and at last *Chi-Chi* cut short her farewells and the incandescent abuse, and sped off at full speed

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for the place where Fritz might very properly be supposed to lie. But, though she quested over the very spot where the patrol trawler had been torpedoed, and cruised over the remains of the neutral coasting steamer, *Chi-Chi* found not a single trace of the murderer.

"We'll try again, all the same," said Frazer, when four o'clock arrived, and still nothing came to reward their toil. "Maybe we'll achieve something."

"Yes, if it's only a cold," retorted Collins, the irrepressible one.

Day was deepening into twilight before *Chi-Chi* sighted anything that bore even the dimmest resemblance to a submarine, and then, over the skyline, she made out the silhouette of a conning tower and a whaleback which lay low in the water.

"She's stopped," remarked Frazer, gazing at the distant speck. "I'll bet a bob it's one of ours, too—there's no luck for us."

"All the same, sir," said Collins. "I'm going to get Little Mary ready; she might get a chance to do some spitting."

The gunlayer clambered forward and took off the canvas cover of his pet; opened her breech and slid a full round into her interior. Then he

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adjusted his sights, and tried to make out a number on the far-off conning tower through his telescope, but the light was far too bad. But he could see that on the after end of her whaleback some half-dozen figures were clustered together, and were so engrossed in the task they had in hand that they had not as yet seen the advent of the armed motor boat.

Closer and closer steamed *Chi-Chi*, the speed which had enabled her to win so many cups and trophies in her racing days standing her in good stead as she rapidly closed the distance. Suddenly Collins, at the telescope, gave an exclamation and slapped his thigh.

“ It’s a Fritz, sir,” he called in jubilation. “ And she’s in trouble, too. She looks as though she’s got something foul of her screw and her people are trying to clear it. Look ! They’ve seen us ; they’re clearing away their four-inch.”

Before Frazer could give any orders, the real Navy gunlayer turned and spoke sharply to his gun-crew. The breech block snicked sweetly home ; Little Mary leapt back a foot and a spurt of reddish fire appeared at her muzzle. And almost before the short, sharp bark had died away, it was repeated again, and again, with no

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longer interval than three seconds between the barks.

Around the mounting of the submarine's four-inch gun appeared a host of tiny brown clouds, streaked with vivid orange, which were Collins's shells bursting exactly in the place where they were of most use. Then Frazer, getting closer in, slewed *Chi-Chi*, and her Maxim chattered for a full minute. The half-dozen Germans on the submarine's stern dropped their job and fled for cover, two falling down the conning-tower hatch in their haste, three going overside as the Maxim bullets caught them, and the last dropping in a queer huddled heap on the whaleback.

"Cease firing," ordered Roderick. "We'll go alongside and talk to Fritz. Unless I'm greatly mistaken, that grass hawser he's managed to wrap round his propeller shaft will stop him running, and, seeing that I've got a bead on him, he shouldn't need much persuasion before he surrenders."

A head appeared over the conning tower lip—a head crowned with a cap bearing the insignia of *Seiner Deutscher Majestät's Kriegsflootte*. It lengthened out into the figure of an ober-leutnant—obviously the submarine's captain.

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“ Well ? ” he queried. “ What do you want ? ”

Frazer shrugged his shoulders.

“ You,” he snapped, quite calmly. Then, as an afterthought, “ and your boat,” he added.

The German laughed ; he seemed to possess a poor opinion of *Chi-Chi*—which was his point of resemblance to the skipper of *Hesperus*.

“ But you,” he retorted—“ what will you do with us ; hoist us aboard for a picket boat ? ”

His English was slow, precise and stilted, as though he found his tongue occasionally stumbling over the language’s intricacies. But Frazer lost none of his meaning and his eyes suddenly blazed.

“ Look here, Herr,” he said, very softly. “ You’re in the cart, and you know it. You can’t run away because your screw is foul ; you can’t torpedo me as you did the neutral and then submerge, and . . . ”

Frazer’s jaw shut like a steel trap ; the lid of his right eye flickered down once. Collins, at the gun, saw the wink, and acted thereupon.

The three-pounder barked hoarsely and savagely at point-blank range for exactly thirty seconds, and when she at length grew silent the submarine’s four-inch gun had disappeared overside, leaving

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behind a mounting rent and wrecked through the impact of eight tiny shells, each charged with exceedingly high explosive.

“ And, to continue,” went on Roderick, with a wave of his hand at the wrecked gun. “ You can’t bite me because you don’t happen to have a gun. See? Therefore, as far as I can make it out, you haven’t much option but to surrender.”

The German laughed and snapped out an order in German. Simultaneously one of *Chi-Chi*’s crew ripped forth a yell, and the engineer at the motors started them with a jerk. The motor boat shot ahead just in time ; in time to miss a round fired at almost point-blank range from the submarine’s after gun, which had, till now, remained hidden under her whaleback, but which made up for lost time by sending a stream of forty-pound shells after the scarcely discernible tail of the flying *Chi-Chi*. The motor boat thudded off into the darkness at top speed, and, as Frazer judged her movements hidden from sight, came round in a large circle.

“ Slow down,” ordered Roderick. “ I don’t like the idea of having my leg pulled like that by a Fritz, and I’m going to get even, if it’s at all possible.”

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With her motors crooning softly and with all her hands as silent as the grave, the motor boat crept on, heading back for where the U-boat still lay on the waters. It was now too dark for vision, but through the gloom came shouted gutturals as orders were passed to and from the fresh men now trying to clear that fouled screw, and Frazer steered utterly by sound.

Suddenly, not thirty yards ahead, the hull of the U-boat loomed up.

“ Now,” called Frazer, softly.

The Vickers three-pounder semi-automatic worked faster than ever before in its eventful life. It chattered and stuttered shrilly as it cast shell out of its muzzle, ignoring that four-inch which still stood, naked and ready for business—abaft the U-boat’s conning tower. Starting at the bows, Collins worked a neat openwork pattern in the submarine’s tender skin, and the flashes of his bursting shells were as nicely spaced as though measured off by a ruler. The conning-tower got its share of missiles ; then the after part was perforated neatly, and finally Collins turned his attention to the shadowy four-inch and the men who clustered around it.

The Germans thought they had become the

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centre of attraction for a swarm of hornets as the vicious little three-pounder projectiles burst around their ears ; they thought an earthquake had uprooted their gun when at last it slewed and crashed to the deck. And, when *Chi-Chi's* searchlight chopped through the gloom and a British voice hailed them, they cursed vividly and emphatically.

"What about it now, Fritz?" Frazer was speaking, a note of triumph in his voice. "Got any more monkey tricks up your sleeve?"

The searchlight beam rested for a second on the U-boat's bows, then slowly swept aft. Every shell hole and ragged tear in the plating showed up in the merciless light, and was as plainly visible to the haggard figure on her conning-tower as it was to *Chi-Chi's* exultant crew. The upper part of the U-boat was a wreck.

"Submerge with that little lot, if you can," went on the temporary lieutenant. "And, also allow me to say that if I see your whaleback settle so much as a single inch, I shall plug you still lower down, and send you to your master, the devil, in double quick time. Get me? Now, Mr. Fritz, I'll give you exactly five minutes to surrender. If you haven't seen reason at the

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end of that time, I shall pepper you a bit more and dispose of you out of hand. I can't hang around here all night to suit your convenience.”

The German made no reply, but summoned three of his fellows from the depths of the U-boat. For half their allotted space of grace they conferred, while that pitiless searchlight beam kept their every movement visible. Once one reached to a pocket, but Frazer's voice cut in again in steel-cold tones.

“ I shouldn't advise you to start using pocket artillery, either,” he counselled. “ Don't forget that I've got a Maxim here, and its crew are simply ravenous for your blood. They'll get it, too, if one of you so much as shows the nose of a pistol.”

The four ended their colloquy abruptly and their leader turned towards the dimly-seen *Chi-Chi*, his hands thrust heavenwards.

“ We surrender,” he said, simply. “ Please come alongside and take us aboard.”

“ Not if I know it,” responded Frazer. “ You're quite safe where you are, and I'm not running any risks. I can see through your game all right ; you'd get aboard and trust to being more numerous than my crew, in which case you'd overpower

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us and steal the old hooker. I'm not taking any of that in mine, thank you. Stay where you are for a little while longer ; I'll see that you get taken off before your ship sinks."

A rocket climbed into the heavens with a long trail of fire, burst, and three strings of red stars showed vividly against the velvet background of the clouds. Somewhere—a long way off—a similar constellation answered the signal, but this time the stars were green, and the faint tooting of a steam whistle accompanied them.

For two long hours *Chi-Chi* lay with her diminutive searchlight trained on the U-boat's conning tower, with her three-pounder eager to start distributing destruction once more, and with her Maxim gun's crew impatiently fingering the trigger of that wild-cat weapon. For two long hours the four Germans remained on top of the U-boat's conning-tower waiting for what might happen.

Then, through the darkness, came a puffing and a snorting, as the slim-funnelled, flat-bottomed paddle steamer *Hesperus* punched her way to answer the red rocket's call. She too possessed a searchlight, it appeared, and as she approached she switched it on, taking in, at one glance, the whole scene.

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Her remarks were ribald.

“ Hallo, little cockleshell,” she said. “ Got yourself into trouble and want helping out? I thought you would, so I hung round, and when I saw your signal came to hoist you inboard.”

Frazer laughed, and checked the hot words which rose to Collins’s lips.

“ Not exactly, old tub,” he observed. “ We’re wanting to put money in your pockets, so, if you’ve got a boat, just send it over and take off Fritz’s crew, remembering all the time that if they start hanky-pankyng, I’ve got a nice little Maxim trained on ’em, and there’ll be blood for supper.”

The paddle steamer said nothing more, nor did she make any remarks till after the whole of the submarine’s crew were transferred to her fore saloon; till they were securely tied up with odd ends of rope.

“ And what now, cockleshell? ” she demanded.

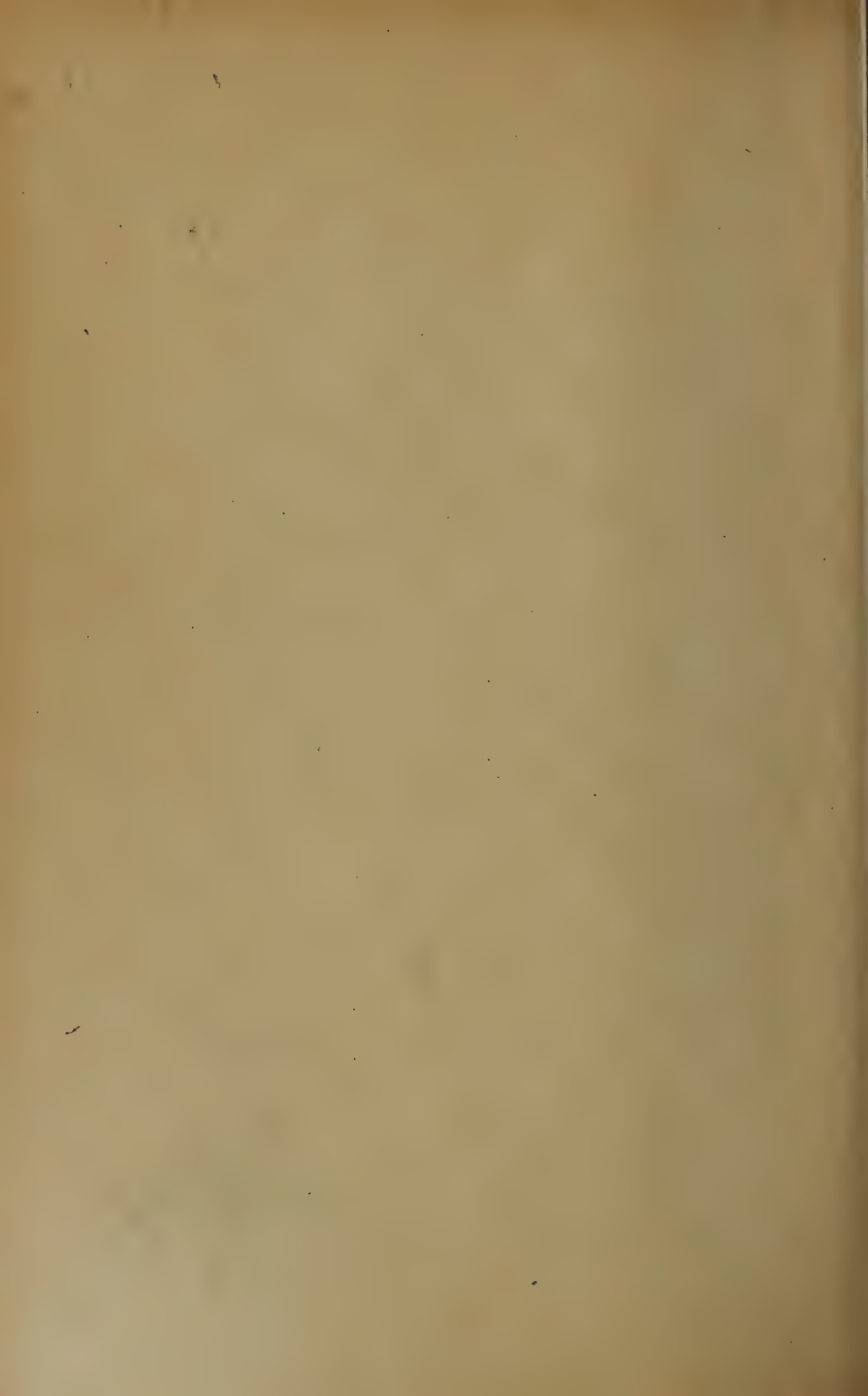
“ Oh,” retorted Frazer, nonchalantly. “ If you’ll just pass us a line we’ll hitch it to the submarine for you, and, if your old tin kettles of engines will stand it, you can tow her home as a prize for us. Also, if you’re not feeling up to the job, say the word, and I’ll tow the pair of you.”

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He stopped and laughed.

“And if you’re very good,” he added, as the steamer’s paddles began to churn, “I’ll not only give you that promised drink out of the prize money, but I’ll buy you each a nice new suit of clothes with brass buttons, and a peaked cap to go with it. Slog on, old girl—slog on.”

STRIKING A BALANCE



STRIKING A BALANCE

X

STRIKING A BALANCE

CRACK! The Vickers semi-automatic three-pounder gun perched on the forecastle of His Majesty's Armed Motor Patrol Boat *Chi-Chi* leapt back a foot, and a thin cloud of whitish smoke issued from its muzzle. But no shell splashed into the sea ahead; the barking was but a signal—a graceful intimation—that *Chi-Chi* desired the pleasure of the company of the big cargo vessel flying the ensign of a neutral country for just so long as it would take to examine her for contraband of war.

The routine of examination service was all too familiar to the motor boat; for months she had done the job—done it daily. Her regular practice was to fire a round of blank from the gun, when the hailed ship would politely stop; *Chi-Chi* would then cruise over, and, while three of her crew ran through the ship, searching for things she ought not to carry, Temporary Lieutenant Roderick Frazer, *Chi-Chi's* peace-time owner and

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war-time commander, would inspect her papers and exchange news and notes with her officers. The thing usually ended in friendly farewells, as the ship—found “clean”—and the motor boat parted company, and passed on their lawful occasions.

Therefore, when the big neutral stopped, Frazer turned his boat, intending to run alongside her. And it was this turning movement which saved *Chi-Chi* from sudden and violent disaster.

The neutral had no sooner checked her way than a dozen yards of her false bulwark dropped, exposing to view three of the latest and most efficient six-inch quick-firing guns, all of which came into immediate action with the intention of lifting the inquisitive patrol boat well above the scheme of things.

“Oh!” ejaculated Frazer. “So that’s your little game, is it? An armed raider masquerading as an innocent neutral; I’ve heard of your kind, but never met one of the type before. And now that I have made your acquaintance so suddenly, I’m disposed to like your room better than your company, so if you’ve no objections and I can get away unhit I’ll leave you. Good-bye!”

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He nodded to his engineer, who immediately gave *Chi-Chi* her head, and the little craft, remembering sudden calls upon her for speed in the otiose days of motor-boat racing when she had pulled so many critical races out of the fire, put her nose down to it, and literally ate up the sea.

The shells fell all about her as the three six-inch guns spat fire and death as fast as they could be loaded, but her speed and her insignificance rendered her exceedingly difficult to hit, and she came through it all unscathed, though there were times when Frazer and others of her crew of six felt the wind of the shells, so close was the passage.

Of course, as she ran, she spat back. The Vickers three-pounder cracked sharply—not with blank this time—and the perky brass-jacketed Maxim perched on her stern chattered insolently. But neither weapon could be expected to do much damage; the range was increasing too rapidly as the wild-cat boat sped away from danger, though the three-pounder did manage to drop a shell on the steamer's bridge and disable her steering gear so that she yawed off her course and gave *Chi-Chi* a breathing-space from those terrible guns.

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Petty Officer " Jumper " Collins, *Chi-Chi's* gun-layer, and the only pukka Navy man among her crew of six, all told, spat on his hands and apostrophised the supposed neutral vividly.

" What rotten shooting ! " he concluded. " You ought to be sent to Whale Island for a proper course ; lumme, if you couldn't shoot better than that, they'd boot you out of the Service."

Frazer grinned, in spite of his chagrin.

" They don't seem very expert with their big guns, Collins," he observed.

" Expert ! " snorted Collins. " If they were shooting for coconuts they wouldn't get a smell of the whiskers. Now, if only I was behind one of them big pieces, I'd have knocked this hooker into splinters long ago—but then Fritz never could shoot anything worth while."

Frazer looked at the big ship, now silent, though the muzzles of her armament still pointed in *Chi-Chi's* direction. Then his eye swept around his own craft, taking in the three-pounder, the Maxim, and the twin fourteen-inch torpedoes which reposed in the Admiralty-pattern, picket-boat dropping gear cluttering her narrow deck. Suddenly he spoke.

" I'm rather inclined to agree with you, Collins,"

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he said. "Also, I'm rather inclined to take another chance at that raider; I don't exactly care about running away from a chap who's been so rude to me. Look here, Jumper, do you think if we were steaming fast towards that hooker you could manage to keep his guns busy?"

"I'm sure of it, sir," responded the gunlayer. "Just give me the chance, that's all."

"Well," continued Roderick, "I'm going to take the boat down upon him at top speed, and, as soon as we get close enough, smack a torpedo off at him. He won't have a great target to fire at if we keep bows on, and if you can manage to slap shells all around those guns you ought to demoralise his aim. See the scheme?"

"As clear as mud, sir," retorted the gunner.

He spat on his hands once more, and turned to the two men who formed his gun crew.

"Now, you two lads are really going to see what might be properly called rapid firing," he said. "And, also, you're going to earn fully that enormous screw you're paid for your job. I want shells hustled into this weapon as fast as you can hustle 'em; and if I'm kept waiting a single second, I'll have something serious to say to you after the scrap is over. The whole thing

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depends on you, because if one of those six-inchers catches us a wallop, we'll all be hoisted to the edge of a cloud where we'll sit in our shirts and play banjos for ever and ever. And now, chuck off your chests all the prayers you can remember—and stand by ! ”

Chi-Chi slewed in her stride and sped off towards the steamer. Frazer, so as to be near his torpedoes, dropped down into the well alongside the engineer ; Collins and his trusty helpers swung the gun round and commenced to fire as fast as possible ; while the remaining hand passed a cartridge belt into the Maxim, and stood by to commence operations as soon as such a proceeding became necessary, which was exactly at the moment when the range narrowed down to the extreme distance of flight of his bullets.

The three-pounder, firing faster than ever before in her short life—*Chi-Chi* had only drawn her some three months previously to replace one that had been knocked out by a belligerent U-boat—sprayed its tiny shells all along the steamer's three-gun battery ; and though the six-inchers recommenced their clamour, the buzzing of the puny hornets around the crew's ears and the fumes they threw off as they exploded made

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their shooting far from accurate, and *Chi-Chi* remained unhit.

Right on she dashed, till she was within two thousand yards.

"What about torpedoes, sir?" yelled Collins, without taking his eye from his sight.

"A little nearer first," responded Fraser. "I can't afford to risk missing her."

A thousand yards, and still the gear had not dropped a tin fish into the water. Frazer, however, deciding that the next minute would offer his opportunity, bent to the firing lanyard. His eye measured the distance to the steamer, saw that the direction was exactly correct. He bent to make a final adjustment, and then stood up for a last look before pulling the lanyard which would drop the automobile torpedo into the sea, where she would steer a straight course towards the enemy.

But he never fired that torpedo. As he looked for the last second the steamer suddenly disappeared behind a colossal upflung gout of spray; a dull, shuddering explosion followed a vivid tongue of flame. Then the sea fell back and the steamer listed heavily over to port, while those who had lately belched forth shell from the

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six-inchers abandoned their posts and fought for places in the rapidly-filling boats.

"That's curious," gasped Roderick. "That explosion was exactly like that caused by a hitting torpedo; and yet I haven't fired."

"I was just going to compliment you on a good shot, sir," put in Collins. "But it appears that somebody's got there before you, and robbed us of our prey. I wonder who it was?"

"Periscope off the port beam!" The hand by the Maxim pointed towards where, through the sea surface, the pole-like head of a periscope grew momentarily longer and longer.

"There's something familiar about that thing," mused Frazer. "I've seen it before, I'm sure."

"It's not our Navy pattern, anyway," put in Collins. "Re-load! I'm going to get a bead on this chap in case he turns out to be a Fritz."

So, with the three-pounder waiting to bark, the periscope elongated itself, broadened out into a conning tower—a conning-tower of Germanic pattern, but which bore a British letter and number. Then the hatch was thrown back, and a head appeared—an unmistakably British head—crowned by the laurelled cap of "The Trade."

"Hallo, motor boat," it called, "who are you?"

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"We're *Chi-Chi*, for the time being an examination vessel," responded Frazer. "May I ask you a similar question?"

The figure laughed, drew itself up to the conning-tower top, and gave certain orders. The submarine turned and cruised slowly towards the motor boat, utterly ignoring the steamer, who, at this second canted her stern to the skies and slid downwards to the place where she intended sending many innocent non-combatant ships—the sea-bed.

"Take a good look at us," counselled the submarine officer. "Surely you've seen us before?"

"I rather fancy I have," said Roderick. "But I can't quite place you."

The other laughed.

"Well, once upon a time this craft was U 73," came the reply. "And, if you're the one and only *Chi-Chi*, he fell captive to your bow and spear."

Collins gave vent to a great laugh.

"That's the chap we had an argument with, sir," he explained. "The one the paddle-steamer told us about, and which we got him to tow home for us. Surely you remember?"

It was Frazer's turn to laugh. "Well, I'm blest!" he ejaculated. "To think that a hooker

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we'd taken ourselves should come and torpedo another that we were having an argument with—it sounds like something out of a book! But, old man," he continued, addressing the submarine, "I can't say that I exactly thank you for slamming your tin-fish into that steamer; I'd got a lovely bead on her with one of my own torpedoes and would have smashed her myself in another minute."

"I quite agree," said the submariner. "But you see, I happened to have a new type of torpedo-tube built into this ship and I was anxious to see if it did all they claimed for it. It works very well," he added; "and, besides, you must remember that if you'd fired one torpedo at that chap, you'd have had a very heavy list till you got another one to balance you, and you'd have been exceedingly uncomfortable for several days. I hope you'll forgive me for butting in, anyway."

"Certainly, old man," responded Roderick. "If you can stand tea brewed in an empty petrol tin, came alongside and have a cup."

* * * *

Exactly a week later *Chi-Chi* was feeling her way through the folds of a dense, black sea-fog

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that had descended with strange suddenness upon the North Sea. She was no longer an examination vessel ; those responsible for varying the jobs of motor patrols had bestowed upon her the duty of carrying certain mails to outlying submarines—submarines whose wandering proclivities led them to work off the mouth of the Elbe, where occasionally enemy warships might be expected to roam.

“ Like trying to look through a blanket,” moaned Frazer, rubbing his smarting eyes. “ At times like this all shipping should be stopped ; it’s a positive danger to move about in this sort of fog. Ten knots to *Chi-Chi* is crawling ; yet, if we go any faster we’re bound to hit something, and split like a sardine can ; and, personally, I’ve no relish for a wet shirt to-night.”

“ Boat ahoy ! Boat ahoy ! ” The hail came through the fog. Roderick stopped his grumbling and strained his eyes afresh ; all hands peered into the fog, trying to discern from whence men were hailing in English. It fell to Collins to find them.

“ There, off the port bow,” he called at last. “ A bit of a smudge in the fog. Ahoy, there ! ”

“ Ahoy ! ” the hail was repeated, and *Chi-Chi*,

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now scarcely moving, edged over towards it. Ten minutes sufficed to bring her alongside the smudge, which developed into a tiny folding Berthon boat, such as is carried in submarines, containing seven men and an officer.

"Hallo!" said Frazer, as he surveyed the group. "This is hardly the sort of weather I should choose for boating in the North Sea, and I can't say that I admire the stoutness of your craft. Who are you?"

The officer turned and peered through the gloom; Frazer, the better to assist sight, risked quite a lot by switching on a small pocket torch he carried and shining it upon the upturned face.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "It's our pal the submarine chap—the fellow who torpedoed the 'neutral' for us the other day. What the dickens are you doing there? What have you done with my submarine?"

"If you'll take me and my crowd aboard out of this rotten little boat," said the lieutenant, "I'll explain. But, first of all, allow me to remark that I didn't choose the weather, and that I'm not floating around here in a tub of tarred canvas for the benefit of my health."

The eight scrambled aboard the motor boat,

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crowding her already confined space. They huddled in the well with the motors ; they dived down the forepeak, where the men lived when off duty ; they lay on the upper deck, with the torpedo-dropping gear for company. Frazer led the lieutenant into his own tiny cabin aft, and, setting before him spiritual refreshment, demanded the yarn.

“ We were being chased by an enemy torpedo boat in the fog,” explained the submariner, “ and we couldn’t submerge because something had gone wrong with the works. We thought we’d shaken him off, when, all at once, we went high and dry on the mud-flats off the mouth of the Elbe—just here.” He reached over and indicated a certain spot on the chart. “ There’s a big shore battery just above there, and a trawler was nosing round,” continued the lieutenant, “ so I thought it policy to abandon her. But I couldn’t quite see making Fritz a present of her, especially as she’s chock-a-block with all sorts of tricky little devices that are more or less experimental, but which our Service regards as dead secrets. I knew that if she lay there when the fog cleared, or if Fritz found her, he’d refloat her and take her into harbour, so, after the last

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man had gone, I shoved an explosive charge under the motors, fitted a slow match, and, hanging around in the Berthon, waited for the bang."

The speaker reached over and drank deeply of the whisky and soda.

"There was no bang!" he snapped half angrily. "That infernal fuze refused to work, and when I found her in the fog again, a blessed Hun trawler was squatting alongside and holding her hand, just to encourage her in case she should be frightened of the fog. And now, to think that this, the first command I've ever had, should fall intact, secrets and all, into the hands of the folks that built her! It's the absolute limit; and they'll shoot me as sure as eggs."

"Cheer up!" consoled Roderick. "I may be able to do something for you, after all. Just show me again where she lies."

The lieutenant put his finger on the exact spot. Roderick marked it with his fountain-pen, then performed a host of abstruse calculations on the back of an envelope.

"Yes," he said at last. "I'll promise you one of two things. Either we'll get her off, or, if Fritz hasn't shifted her already, demolish her for

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you. And now, help yourself to the whisky, but be careful of the soda—it's the last syphon I've got—I'm going to be busy."

Two hours later Frazer called down to the tiny cabin. "I say," he remarked, "if you want to see your little hooker again, just pop up here and plant your peepers on her for the absolutely last time."

The lieutenant hopped up, and, through a rift in the fog saw his submarine, lying on a shoal like a stranded whale. And sheer alongside her was the enemy trawler, keeping guard till opportunity should allow of her being refloated. The sight was maddening.

"And now, hang tight," ordered Frazer.

Chi-Chi slowed and crept on, her motors humming softly. She got to within four hundred yards ere the trawler, sensing danger, switched on a searchlight and tried to pierce the thick vapour. The light was about as effective as if a blanket had screened it, but it served Frazer for a much-needed point of aim.

"Now!" he breathed softly, and bent to the torpedo-dropping gear. He tugged on the lanyard; there was a faint splash overside, then the twitter of a pair of screws revolving at high

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speed, and the fourteen-inch torpedo steadied itself on a dead course towards the derelict submarine.

There was a thudding crash, and the fog was rent by a vast tongue of orange flame. The trawler became alarmed, and switched on a second searchlight.

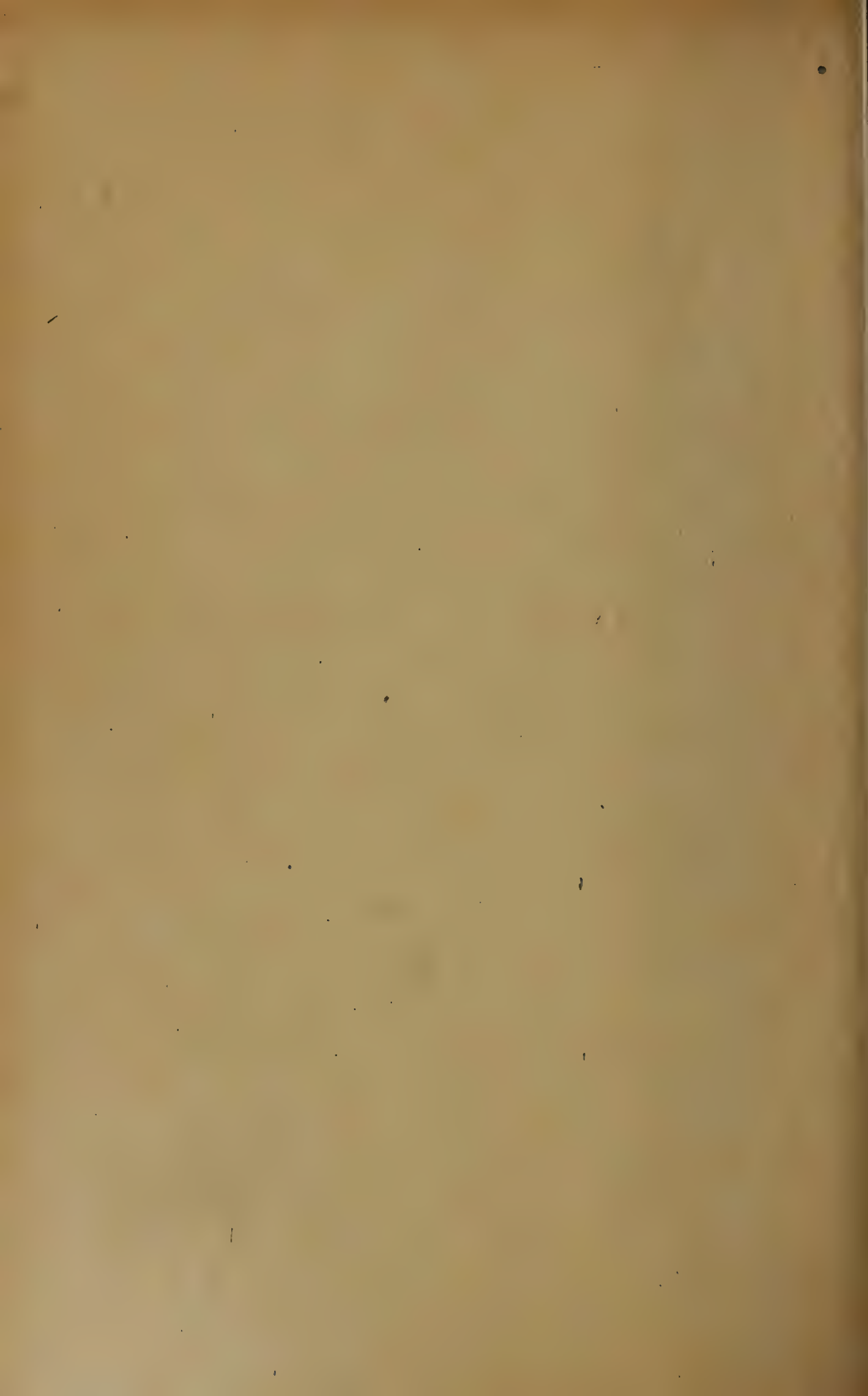
"And so that we shan't be out of balance through having to carry one torpedo about," muttered Roderick, "we'll present it to you, Mr. Trawler!"

He aimed at a point exactly between the two redly-burning moons in the fog, and three seconds later both were blotted out by a second flash. The fort on the shore, meanwhile, had got busy, and, although she could see no target, was firing all her guns at once, perhaps believing that the accursed British were making an attack in force.

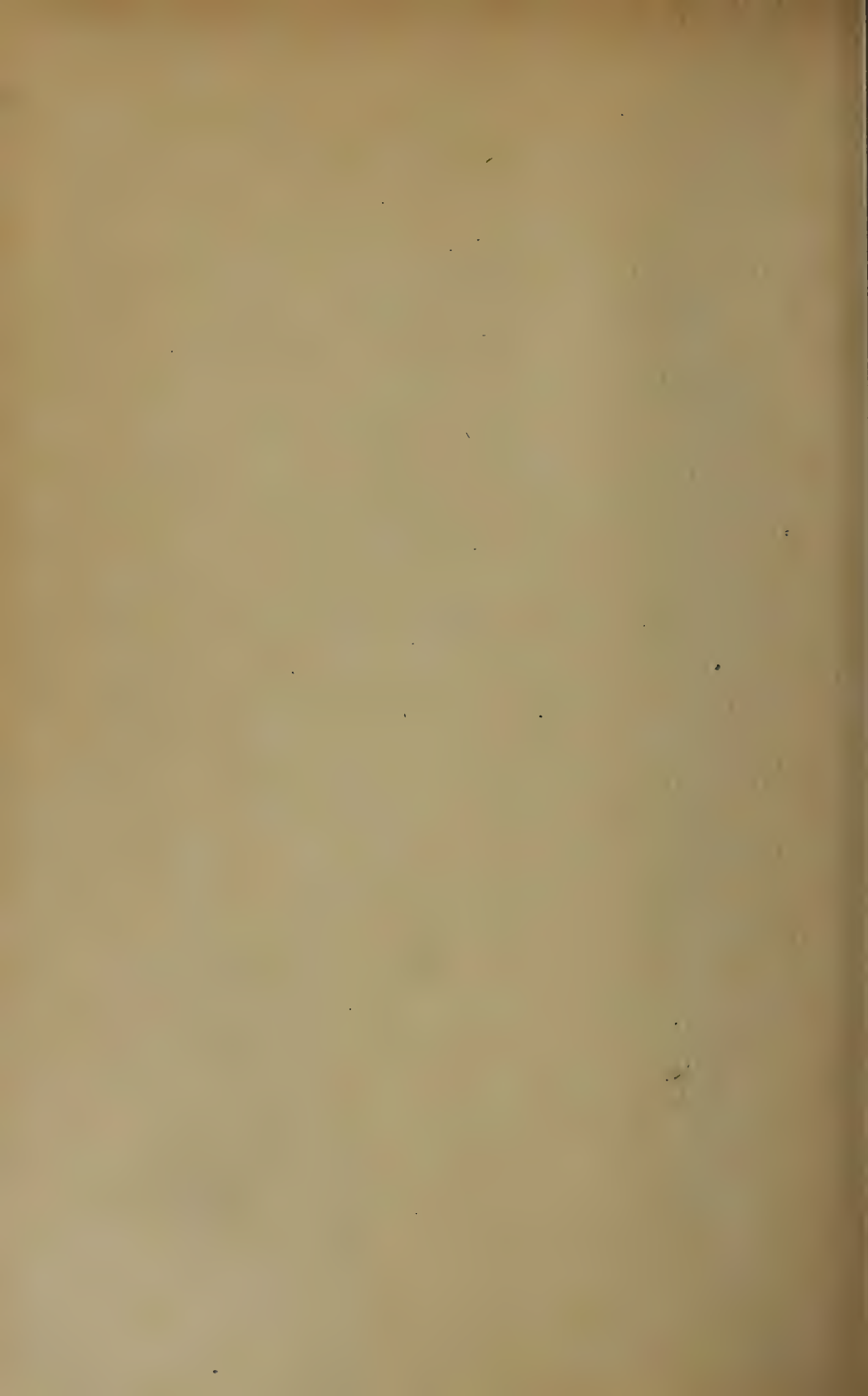
Chi-Chi, however, was far beyond reach, having sped off at the second explosion, and, while His Britannic Majesty's Submarine Q 37—late *Seiner Deutschcr Majestät's Unterseeboote* 73—sank in small pieces to the bottom of the sea, accompanied by the trawler who had held her hand for fear of the dark, the lieutenant and *Chi-Chi's*

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owner-commander pledged each other in the last of the whisky and soda, the one using for a tumbler an empty jam-tin, while a cracked mug served the other as a triumphal goblet.



“ VON TIRPITZ ! ”



"VON TIRPITZ!"

XI

"VON TIRPITZ!"

"AND this," moaned Lieutenant Augustine Reginald Batty, Royal Navy, commanding officer of His Majesty's elderly and disreputable Torpedo Boat O 36, "is what they call a patrol station. In my opinion, it's a blinking refrigerator, and I should like to have ten full unofficial minutes with the bounder who detailed me to look after it."

He snapped out an order to the helmsman which sent O 36 gliding well to the starboard of a monster iceberg, and buttoned his lammy suit closer to his chin in the keen air. His sub-lieutenant and second in command, one Marmaduke Bliss, smiled happily at his senior's outburst. He didn't mind the loneliness at all, and the cold left him unaffected.

"I wouldn't moan about anything at all," went on Batty, as O 36 steadied on her course once more, "but we never see anything worth strafing. Now, if only an occasional chance submarine

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would lose her way and meander in this direction, so that we could strafe her, we might bring the fact of our existence to the notice of the powers that be and get removed to some more exciting beat."

Bliss stiffened suddenly, and flung out a pointing hand to the northward.

"What more do you want than that?" he queried. "Old Von Tirpitz himself come to pay you a call."

"Glory be!" exclaimed Batty. "It's actually a submarine, I do believe; though what the dickens she's rigged up with beats me. Give her a round from the forecastle gun, quick, and for the Lord's sake plug her. We haven't had a chance like this in all our lives before."

With the aurora borealis making delicate tracery on the night sky behind her, and with gigantic icebergs encompassing her on almost all sides, lay a German U-boat. In the light the two officers could even see the black-and-white diapered lines on her upper part, and the white painted U on her conning-tower. But she was not as other U-boats. From her bows, extending on each side and outwards, curved like the claws or pincers of a lobster, were a pair of

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antennæ, the invention of her own ober-leutnant and the means whereby she had up to now managed to cut her way through various nets set to catch her.

Night time was her favourite period for breathing, and, like other of her sisters, it had indeed proved to be the only safe time for coming to the surface. Therefore, when O 36 called to her with the forecastle six-pounder, she resented the interruption but stayed not to argue. Deeming the depths safer and more peaceful, she dipped hastily, just as the six-pounder shell, flying wide, exploded near the summit of an attendant iceberg. And the chunks of ice flung apart by the explosion fell crashing into the sea, some even sinking as fast as she did. Indeed, one huge piece, weighing some fifteen tons, dropped clean on the starboard claw of her net-cutters, and snapped it off like a rotten carrot.

O 36's officers swore heartily and unashamedly, and very loudly, at that unlucky layer of the six-pounder.

“ Best chance we ever had, and we missed it,” they cried in unison, as the boat reached the spot lately vacated by the German. “ But he

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won't get any peace now we've seen him. We'll make his life a mizz."

And they did. Their wireless called to all the other boats of the patrol, reported "Von Tirpitz," and made arrangements to ensure the complete misery of her life thereafter. And by means of their own, possessed by all U-boat hunters, they shadowed that one-whiskered submarine so that she became a fugitive. Wherever she went some craft with designs upon her life showed up and headed her off. A drifter caught her one day, and it was only after three hours' bitter fighting with the bomb-charged nets that the submarine got away. On another occasion a trawler ran a wire-hawser sweep under her keel as she lay on the bottom, and the submarine only got clear in time. Three minutes more, and that red tin of gun-cotton, with electric wire attached, which they slid down the taut wire, would have rested against her hull, and, upon the touch of a button, have sent her sides crashing inward like a squashed bully-beef tin.

They headed her back into O 36's sphere of influence at last, and one night she came up for breath as usual. The six-pounder again snapped

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angrily, and this time the port leg of her antennæ flew circling through the air, leaving her as any other boat.

She slid downwards rapidly, and pushed blindly southward again at a horrible depth, while her storage-batteries sparked badly and gave off fumes which almost choked her crew. By good fortune she managed to hide herself for one full day in a Scottish inlet ; but at the end of that time a scouting motor-boat—bearing the effeminate cognomen *Chi-Chi*, and commanded by one Temporary Lieutenant Roderick Frazer, R.N.V.R.—asked her *via* a three-pounder semi-automatic gun firing twenty rounds a minute—and the motor boat spoke for a full minute, too—what she wanted.

As “ Von Tirpitz ” had no convincing answer ready he evaded the question in his usual way, and added another bloodthirsty tracker to the list of his immediate foes. For nearly a hundred miles across the North Sea the torpedo boat and the cockleshell motor boat followed him, and the submarine began to hope that at last he was bound for home. But he ran into a long line of more than usually dangerous nets, and turned back disgustedly, running once more to

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the south-east. Although she did not know it, she passed once more from O 36's ken ; but *Chi-Chi*, being tied down to no restricted area, accompanied her as if towed. They made the mouth of the Channel, just off Dover, and here a paddle-boat added itself to the chase, an elderly paddle-boat whose name ended with *Belle* and who had once carried holidaying crowds to "fortified towns" on the South Coast, such as Ramsgate and Margate. She ran up alongside "Von Tirpitz" one night just at breathing-time, and failing to ram him, owing to some trick of tide or helm, tried to drop a lump of dynamite down his open conning-tower hatch. But the light was bad, and the bullets from the German ober-leutnant's revolver whistled round the skipper's ears, so the attempt failed.

He shook off his trackers, save for the motor boat, who now became so weather-stained and short of fuel and provisions that he had to appoint another small pigmy craft as his deputy. And some inquisitive vessel, seeing the strange motor boat on the job, spread a rumour that there were now two submarines instead of one in the hunt, and hopes rose accordingly. The disappointment when it finally came out that

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it was still the same old craft who was being hunted was intense, but made the hunters all the more determined to kill.

Then came a day when " Von Tirpitz " found himself surrounded, quite close to shore, and well within O 36's beat, by a host of small craft. Trawlers, drifters, ocean-going tugs, paddle-steamers, mostly from the Clyde and the Forth ; motor boats, and one or two torpedo boats, who proclaimed their presence hoarsely, and stood aloof to watch or to bear a hand as the necessity arose—all the pack were there, waiting to kill.

The submarine tried to break through to the open sea, but the snares were too strong for him. Fighting bitterly all the time, he was driven towards the land, over the mud-flats and sand-banks. He tried to dive, but the bottom was too close for safety, and he bumped upwards at an alarming rate. Then he turned, and really before he knew it, discovered an ancient runway, unguarded by nets. He promptly took it, leaving behind his periscope—a six-pounder shell from a resentful drifter snapped it off—and emerged at the other end temporarily free, but blind.

Another day of grace was accorded him, during which he rigged his spare eye ; but this time

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wandering coastguards turned him into a rifle-practice target, and succeeded in scoring bull's-eyes on three of his crew.

Followed another week of hunting, during which "Von Tirpitz'" crew grew sullen and discontented, and only their hatred of the hunters prevented their mutinying incontinently and surrendering their craft to the patrols. But their ober-leutnant, like the sportsman he was, told them that it was up to them to see the game through, and read them extracts from German newspapers which stated that all submarine crews captured with their ships were towed astern of their own boats and drowned.

"But," he added, "I have every reason to believe that if the boat is lost, they simply intern the crews till the end of the war; but even that is not good enough for we children of the Kaiser. So, if the end comes, we must destroy the boat. That, of course, means that we shall all be killed outright."

Now, I have said he was a sport, and he did not want his men to be killed. One should die for the safety of the others, he explained.

"We will all draw lots," he went on; "I with the rest of you. The man who has the ace

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of spades"—or its German equivalent—"dealt to him will be the selected man. When the end comes—if we cannot escape—that man will stay below while the others go on deck, and he will have a bomb with an instantaneous fuse ready in his hand. When the hunters come to take off the prisoners, I, or the senior man on deck, will kick hard three times in succession on the hull. Then the bomb will go off, and if the accursed British get the men, they will lose the boat. Is it so?"

"It is so," growled the crew, and the cards were dealt.

Breathlessly each man grabbed his little pack as they came to him, and a little fair-haired Saxon gasped with terror. Then he straightened his shoulders and looked his officer between the eyes. "The honour has fallen to me," he said simply. "It is enough. The Fatherland demands it."

For the next day, and the three following that, the little fair-haired Saxon prayed that the old German Gott would see U 72 through the mess. But stores ran short; provisions were giving out at an alarming rate, and the storage batteries were running dry. U 72—or "Von Tirpitz"

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—decided to seek another friendly inlet, ignorant of the fact that there were now three motor boats acting as his shadows.

He sought shallow water, where he could lie secure and rest. But he found it not till the third day, when the battery almost refused to give off enough current to run his motors. And then, with *Chi-Chi* and her sisters close on his heels, he ran into shoal water once more. No runway opened to him this time, the bay he had chosen was landlocked, and the way to the sea barred by those three boats.

“The end has come,” remarked the ober-leutnant. “You are ready, Johann?”

The fair-haired boy went to a locker, and removed a small case. From its interior he disinterred a spherical object. He withdrew the safety-pin, and handed it to his superior. Then he placed his thumb on the trigger—the loosing of which would immediately detonate the bomb—and knelt close to the hull.

“I am ready, Herr Leutnant,” he said.

“Surface; blow all ballast,” ordered the officer. The boat shot upwards, twenty yards away from the trio of hunters. The conning-tower hatch sprang back, and the crew filed slowly out on to

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"Von Tirpitz'" whaleback. Temporary-Lieutenant Frazer seized a megaphone.

"Anybody there speak English?" he demanded.

"I do," replied the leutnant, sure of the next question.

"Then what about it?" came the words. "Do you surrender?"

The German shrugged his shoulders. "I have little option," he replied. "Yes, of course."

The three motor boats moved slowly, cautiously, ahead, their pigmy guns ready for immediate action at the first sign of treachery. Those men who were not guns' crews loosened their automatics.

Twenty yards away two of the boats slowed and stopped, keeping their guns trained on the U-boat's conning-tower. *Chi-Chi* shot alongside, Frazer standing in the stern sheets.

"All there?" he asked. "Nobody below?"

"No one at all," replied the ober-leutnant, as he made to step into the boat.

"Hang on a minute, then," was the order, and the brown-faced young man swiftly counted the Germans. Then, pistol in hand, he clambered to the submarine's whaleback. The ober-leutnant stepped quickly towards the conning-tower.

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"Wait a minute, Herr, I said," interposed Roderick. "Don't be in a hurry."

He thrust the muzzle of his automatic under the German's nose, and the latter gave back a step.

"Collins," called the lieutenant to his gun-layer, "just keep your pistol on these chaps, and if any of 'em tries to approach the conning-tower, drop him. I'll stand the racket."

He drew himself swiftly to the top of the tower, and dropped within. Inside, close to the hull, he saw a fair-haired Saxon, crying bitterly, but with his ears cocked for a signal. And in his hand was a bomb.

"Don't drop that thing," said Roderick quietly in German, "or it might go off, and then you'll lose that nice, comfortable internment-camp we've got ready specially for you. Besides, if you do drop it, your mother will miss you ever so much. And don't forget I've got a pistol pointing straight at you. Best come on deck with me, and don't be a ruddy fool."

The fair-haired youngster, at the first words, started. He thought swiftly. The signal—the three kicks—had not come, therefore his comrades were still on deck. If he exploded the bomb he would kill them all as well as himself,

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and that was what he didn't wish to do. And at the mention of his mother he broke down completely.

He stood up, and with the few words of English at his command, intimated his willingness to accompany the officer. The latter pointed to the ladder with his pistol, and followed close on the Saxon's heels.

“ Now then, over into the sea with it, quick ! ” he ordered, at the top. The explosion drenched the German crew, but did no other harm. The transhipment took three minutes, the run to shore and the posting of armed guards on the landed prisoners another three, and then the motor boats returned to the carcass.

They searched “ Von Tirpitz ” thoroughly ; they found quite elaborate plans and charts on board her, some of British ports and others of German harbours ; and they also found the huge store of gasoline which she had not been able to use through being kept below the surface by the harriers.

“ And that reminds me,” said Frazer, “ I've wired to —— for the torpedo boat which usually beats in that neighbourhood to come and take this boat in tow, and, as we've used quite a lot

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of Government gasoline in the capture of the packet, I don't see any reason why we shouldn't fill up from these tanks. Anyway, it'll be something to do while O 36 is on her way down here."

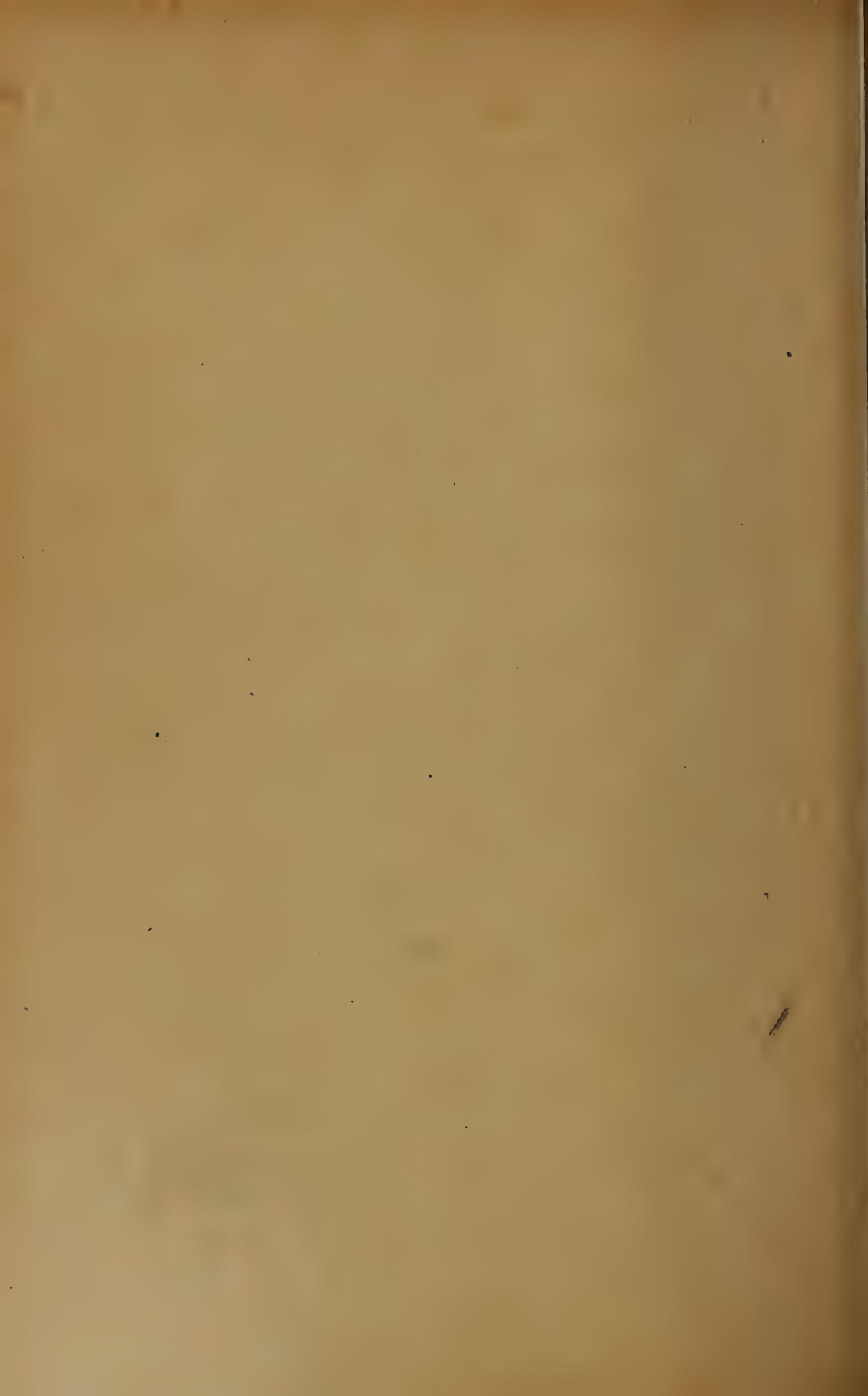
The tanks had scarcely absorbed the last drop ere O 36 poked her inquisitive nose into the inlet. Batty was quickly put in possession of the facts and of the "kill," and as he passed a wire-hawser for towing U 72, even as he rang down for speed on his engines and went ahead, he gave vent to his feelings once more.

"Once in a blue moon we saw a submarine, and worked like devils to catch her," he moaned. "And then, after three weeks of the most harassing work we've ever done, we have to come and take her in tow, somebody else having got the credit and prize money. If there wasn't a war on I'd send in my papers, and start a farm."

"And," chipped in Sub-Lieutenant Bliss, "you'd be back at sea again in a week, even if they sent you Arctic-exploring."

He would have said more, but a flying log-book took him neatly by the back of the head, and when he had recovered his composure the only words he found handy were profane, and therefore unprintable.

DEFECTS—AND A GADGET



DEFECTS—AND A GADGET

XII

DEFECTS—AND A GADGET

“ DEFECTS ! we’re reeking with ’em ! ” observed Temporary Lieutenant Roderick Frazer, R.N.V.R., commander of H.M. Armed Motor Patrol Boat *Chi-Chi*, waving the pink sheet which had arrived by that morning’s dispatch boat ; “ it’d be much easier for me to say what *Chi-Chi* wasn’t suffering from than to fill it on these what repairs she requires. But I’m afraid that if I’ve got to make a full return of everything that’s wrong with her, I shall want a dozen more sheets.”

He jabbed the pink flimsy paper with an aggrieved forefinger, and commenced to search through his pockets for a stub of pencil. “ Jumper ” Collins, the pukka Navy petty officer lent to the racing motor boat when she became a unit of Britain’s Navy, and the man to whom was entrusted the working of the regulation Vickers semi-automatic three-pounder that peered over her low forecastle, looked over his commander’s shoulder and hid an expansive smile with an almost as expansive hand.

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"The old popgun's all right, anyway, sir," he ventured; "so you needn't include her."

Frazer turned.

"Yes, and so are our tins of high explosive and our little mine-drag," he replied. "But beyond those there isn't a thing in or on the boat that shouldn't have been condemned months ago. We're a floating wreck, nothing more nor less, and if they would only build a new boat, equipped with new engines, a new Maxim gun and torpedo dropping gear, fresh sleeping bags, another rudder and screw and other accessories, I believe we could make do till the end of the war with the gun and the drag and the explosives. But they won't, though they'll have a fit when they see my list of defects. Anyway, it's something to have the Admiralty foot the repair bill. I've paid for *Chi-Chi's* mending many a time myself, and it'll do me good to relieve my own pocket of the strain once in a way."

"The Navy's a good firm, you know, sir," put in the gunlayer. "They don't mind what they spend so long as their boats are O.K."

"I'm glad of that," retorted Roderick. "I'll lush 'em up to a nice amount this time, you bet."

He bent to the pink sheet and did his best to

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describe thereupon the various ailments from which the one-time racing motor boat now suffered. For three years she had stood the rack and strain of the North Sea in all weathers ; had run messages for big ships ; been errand boy for small ships, and, for the last twelve months, had acted as one of the terriers of the Pack That Hunt The Unterseeboote. And she was beginning to show the marks of stress. Her trim, narrow hull leaked in a score of places ; her miniature pump had the greatest task in the world to keep her dry. Her deck was all torn and splintered ; its usually snowy planks warped and twisted ; her engines could only develop half their usual horse-power—and her speed and efficiency were therefore considerably reduced. The Maxim mounted on her stern fired when it thought fit ; the twin sets of torpedo-dropping gear clattering her narrow deck were rusty and strained, and could not be relied upon to do their duty in emergency, while when Frazer put over his wheel, the rudder sometimes slewed *Chi-Chi*, and at other times allowed her to career onwards in her own chosen way. Other minor defects had manifested themselves recently, and it was obvious that unless the armed motor boat was

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to become a menace to herself and her fellows, she must soon spend a few weeks in a dockyard and be once more restored to her pristine youth, efficiency, and vigour.

Roderick Frazer managed to convey some idea of his command's shakiness to Those in Authority, and as a result the dispatch vessel, some three or four weeks later, brought him orders to proceed to his base to be overhauled. *Chi-Chi*, when the news reached her, was busily engaged in experimenting with a new device thought out by Roderick's fertile brain—a device which had to do with the dicky little drag supplied to motor boats for fishing up enemy mines, and with the red tins of high explosive provided for the destruction of wreckage likely to be dangerous to navigation or hiding places for enemy *untersee* craft. And, as the experiment had not yet quite reached its final stage, Frazer decided that another day off the Belgian coast would not do him or his craft much harm. Therefore he stayed while the plan matured, and then, seeing its possibilities to the full, picked up his anchor and wandered homewards at easy speed.

He reached his base in due course after a trip distinguished only for its utter uneventfulness,

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and reported his arrival to the Chief Huntsman of the aforesaid Pack.

“ It’s nearly time you took a spell, Frazer,” observed the Chief Huntsman. “ Some other craft might get a look in at the strafing of U-boats while you’re in the dockyard ; you seem to have been scooping ’em in pretty freely of late, according to your official record. Besides, the rest will do you good.”

“ If it does *Chi-Chi* a bit of good I shan’t howl,” replied Roderick. “ I’d have come home before this if I hadn’t been busy testing a new gadget I’ve invented for strafing Fritzes under water, and now I’m here I’d like a couple of days’ leave, sir ; a couple of days in which to persuade Those In Authority to try the gadget for themselves.”

He explained what it was to the Chief Huntsman, and that officer, being intensely practical and efficient, immediately saw the value of the invention. He endorsed Frazer’s application for leave, and sent him to London, where, for two long days, the bright young temporary lieutenant explained his “ gadget ” once more. Department after department listened to his story, and then told him coolly that such a thing didn’t come

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under their jurisdiction, but they'd send him along to those who had to do with such things. And when, after many tribulations, Roderick did manage to gain the ear of the Master of U-Boat Hounds, that gentleman refused to take any action whatever in the matter of the "gadget," and, moreover, forbade Frazer to conduct any further experiments in that direction.

"We have special experimental parties at work in the proper place," he explained, with great unction, "whose sole duty is to think out ways and means of dealing with enemy submarines, but they might as well be non-existent if we are bound to accept the suggestions of every temporary lieutenant who comes along."

Frazer lost his temper.

"We'll see about that, sir," he retorted. "I'm going right along to the Commander-in-Chief, and shall lay the whole case before him, giving him, and the Service, the option of testing the idea and making a considered report thereon—I'm not out for rewards or kudos of any kind for myself, I can assure you—or of accepting my resignation from the Motor Boat Patrols, which, of course, means also that I shall withdraw my craft from service, even if I have

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to break her up for matchwood and scrap-iron."

The M.U-B.H. exuded affronted dignity; he was unused to young officers speaking to him in defiant tones, and he didn't like this new experience very much. When at last he could move he jabbed savagely at a bell, and waited till an Admiralty messenger appeared in the doorway before speaking.

"Show this officer out, Jennings," he snapped. "As for you, sir," turning to Roderick, "I shall report your insolence in the proper quarter, and you'll hear more of it. Good-day, sir."

The Chief Huntsman, when Roderick told him the result of his application, was moved to almost as strong language as the young lieutenant himself; he took it upon himself to get into telephonic communication with the M.U-B.H., only to be told that if he wished to make any representations regarding the matter he was to fill in Forms So-and-So, when they would receive adequate consideration.

"Adequate consideration," he snorted, when at length he and Roderick faced each other across the cabin table. "I know what that means—it's only a polite way of saying the forms and the

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whole matter will be chucked into the waste paper basket, and that one of the best devices I've seen yet for strafing U-boats will be shoved on the shelf till the war is over. Never mind; you're going round to Portsmouth to-morrow morning to the dockyard, and if you can manage to gain the ear of the commander-in-chief of that port, I daresay he'll see that 'our special experimental parties' try the gadget out, and I'm willing to bet my share of the Navy's prize money that they adopt the wheeze, and give you a D.S.O. for being brainy."

"D.S.O. be damned!" snapped Roderick. "They can keep all their alphabetical honours and decorations. I came into this war for the love of the thing, and, hang it all, I don't want rewards for playing the game, and stumbling across an as-yet-untried way of dealing with the enemy's submarine menace. All I want is a fair trial for my gadget, and they can take the thing—if it's worth while—and tack whatever name they like upon it, as far as I am concerned."

He returned to *Chi-Chi*, and conveyed to his crew of five the lack of enthusiasm Those In Authority had shown regarding the new device, whereupon four hardy sailormen lifted up their

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voices in a fine comminatory chant, and Petty Officer "Jumper" Collins, with vivid remembrance of another invention which had never attained adoption by the Navy*—ever a most conservative service—said nothing, but chuckled as his personal opinion of Those In Authority was strengthened by this pig-headed action of one of their number, who, because "Nelson didn't do it," considered that nothing under the sun could be of any use.

Darkness came while the six were discussing the matter, and the searchlights of the base leapt into life as they were tested against the sudden emergency of an attempted air raid. *Chi-Chi's* half-dozen, busy about their preparations for the morrow's voyage to the home dockyard, paid but little attention to them till one commenced winking and blinking in frantic haste until all the rest shut down, leaving its white beam splitting the dark sky clear to the zenith.

"Hallo! What's the meaning of that?" demanded Collins. "Looks like a signal of some sort."

At that moment a hooter rent the night shrilly, and the masthead lamp of the flagship commenced

* See "Action! Stories from the Modern Navy."
5s. net.

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to chatter. Collins, with the ease of the trained Navy man, translated the longs and shorts of the Morse code into ordinary English; and then, the message ended, stepped forward to *Chi-Chi's* forecastle gun and stripped off its cover.

"Zeppelins reported crossing the North Sea, eh?" he muttered. "This is where I do a bit more work to earn the magnificent salary a benign Government pays me—and it is also where Little Mary here expends a few rounds. I've never yet had a slap at a real full-sized German sausage, if you except the observation balloon I chewed up in Flanders a few months back; and I'm going to do my damndest against the gasbags to-night, if they come near enough to give me a chance of seeing 'em."

But they came not for quite a long time, and in the meanwhile the little port sank to the uttermost state of "darkness and composure." Every light disappeared—even the solitary search-light snapped down and the signalling mastheads cloaked themselves in blackness—and not a sound could be heard save the lapping of the waves round *Chi-Chi's* hull. Her crew of six, having never yet seen or taken part in an air raid, anxiously watched developments; and, in

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case rapid movement became necessary, Frazer weighed his anchor and kept his motors ready to leap into life at the call of the sudden emergency. Then, quite suddenly, came from the eastward a queer droning, thudding noise, which could be nothing but airships' engines ; the searchlights stabbed savagely into the purple velvet of the night, quested hither and thither frantically, and at last picking up their objectives, remained steady, while, in the now brightly illumined heavens, half a score units of Germany's aerial navy dodged and twisted in futile efforts to elude the all-revealing beams.

Guns commenced to bark and clamour from all points ; Collins depressed the breech of the three-pounder to its absolute uttermost, but, to his infinite chagrin, the muzzle's highest angle of elevation was hundreds of feet below that of the lowest airship. Still, though he muttered profanely, the petty officer remained at his post waiting for his chance.

With startling suddenness the world seemed to rock and reel as a vivid burst of orange flame blotted out the white glare of the searchlights and the pink stabs of the firing guns ; as a dull rumbling explosion drowned the crackle of the

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anti-aircraft guns. The airships had commenced to drop their deadly bombs ; some fell on land, where they made huge holes in the ground, and did little other damage ; others—more futile still, these—hurtled down into the sea, and created huge waves as they exploded on impact.

Chaos—orderly chaos—reigned ; the guns still clamoured, and the whirr of rising seaplanes chirped eerily between their barkings ; the searchlights still glared, and the airships still swerved and swayed like murderous birds of prey as they laid their deadly eggs.

“ No luck for us, Collins,” shouted Frazer, standing at *Chi-Chi's* wheel. “ You can't make targets of sausages at that height.”

Crash ! Somewhere low down on the waters to port a red gun-flame stabbed, and a shell whistled eerily over the motor boat. Then came another and another, each aimed from different points.

“ Some infernal fool's messing about with a gun,” snorted Collins. “ Fancies we're a Zepp., I should say, by the direction of his fire, or, perhaps, he's aiming round a corner and expects his shells to rise vertically after skimming along the waves.”

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"Wrong, Collins," suddenly yelled Frazer, stretching out a pointing finger; "that's a submarine firing out there, or I've never seen one. Look, here she comes again."

One of the searchlight beams dropped from the sky to the sea, and rested on a black-and-white diapered conning-tower which, besides a number, bore a staring "U." But only for a minute; the now-discovered U-boat kicked up her heels and slid under the surface exactly as Collins's gun spoke for the first time, and exactly as half a dozen shells from another direction whizzed over the stationary motor boat.

Chi-Chi's miniature searchlight fizzed and flared as it was switched on, and Weekes, behind it, swept the seas in search of this new foe. And, instead of only one U-boat, he spotted at least half a dozen more. And, following their leader's example, as soon as they were seen they dipped, only to rise and recommence firing in another place.

Suddenly Roderick slapped his thigh, and gave a yell of delight.

"The gadget!" he cried. "Here's a chance to test it thoroughly. Weekes, switch off! We want the cloak of darkness to deal properly with this business."

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Chi-Chi's defective engines pushed her ahead slowly under Roderick's guidance, while Collins and another hand got out from its locker the dicky little mine drag and half a dozen red tins of high explosive. These latter they attached to the wire rope of the former at certain nicely-calculated intervals, and when all was ready, paid out the rope over the boat's side as she went ahead towards where the pink spurts of fire were thickest.

And, as soon as the drag's sinker gurgled its way through the surface, "Jumper" leant back to his weapon and commenced to pump out shells as fast as they could be crammed into the bore.

Roderick, his eyes shining, took the wheel once more, as *Chi-Chi's* already badly-worn engines groaned their protest, and in the dim light kept an eye on that now taut wire as it led aft under the boat's counter, just clear of the circling screw.

The U-boats saw *Chi-Chi* coming, and prepared to turn her churlishly and emphatically away. But the range was too short, and *Chi-Chi's* speed too high for them to do very effective shooting; besides, their heavier four-inch guns could only fire one round to *Chi-Chi's* three, and as that berserk gunlayer swept his muzzle from side to

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side, those Fritzes rapidly began to consider their present stations too hot, and dived to cooler and less unpleasant regions.

This was exactly what Collins and Frazer required ; the gadget could be no use while the unterseeboten remained on the surface. Therefore, as soon as they disappeared, Frazer called upon his engines for a good burst of speed.

“ Just one run of about ten minutes,” he prayed. “ Just one burst like that when we won the King’s Cup at Cowes, and you can rest for ever afterwards.”

The engines might have been sentient things ; at any rate, when the regulating valve was thrown full open they forgot that they were old and strained, that their bearings were worn and that every joint leaked, every cylinder missed-fire in turn, and pushed *Chi-Chi* onwards at her full forty-odd knots. Frazer’s heart sang within him, and the wire rope of the mine-drag thrummed and twanged happily, as though conscious of its mission.

Suddenly *Chi-Chi* was picked up and thrown aside as though by a giant hand, and a great mound of water rose alongside her, followed a second later by a dull, muffled explosion. Frazer

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yelled an order, and the boat, slewing on her heels stopped and waited for a moment.

“ One ! ” called Roderick triumphantly, taking a huge sniff. “ Can’t you smell the infamous brand of gasolene they serve out to Fritzes ? ”

The five could—they said so, and threw their caps into the air in joy. The gadget was making good.

“ Keep the mafficking till the show’s over,” counselled the lieutenant. “ We’ve only just started. Haul in the fishing line and put more bait on it.”

Once more that drag-wire was hauled in ; once more little red tins of high explosive with instantaneous detonators were attached thereto, and once more its sinker gurgled as it was paid out overside. And ten minutes later, while those antiquated engines miraculously held up, there came a second sudden boom and upheaval of grey water, and a second odour of execrable gasolene telling of another Fritz having paid the supreme penalty.

Frazer and his men had clean forgotten about the aerial fight overhead ; they were too absorbed in their own chase to notice outside matters. Again they re-charged the gadget, and searched

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diligently for yet another Fritz ; freely expressing the opinion that it would not be their luck to perform the hat-trick, even with so many unter-seeboten sculling about that they were in the position of the trawler who has struck a school of herrings.

Then things happened—happened so quickly that even Frazer, who had a full view of everything, could hardly put the details into their proper order afterwards. First of all, from out the sky hurtled a disabled seaplane. It struck the water some twenty feet from *Chi-Chi*, and instinctively Frazer slewed his boat and went to the assistance of the wrecked airmen. He took them aboard—drenched to the skin and bruised in a score of places—and bade them crouch down in the well, where the defective motors still thrummed and chattered in their penultimate effort, so as to be out of the way of his crew and the gadget.

Secondly, a third grey mound of water and a third dulled explosion came to tell of the third Fritz caught by the gadget, and precisely at the same second a ruddy glare illuminated the whole of the heavens. The guns dropped into silence, and, like the roar of waves on a shingly shore,

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the cheers of countless people came to Frazer's ears. He looked up just in time to see, right above his head, the swiftly-falling mass, all ablaze, of what had been a magnificent super-Zeppelin, but which was now all that remained of the prey marked down by an intrepid British aviator.

"Hard a-port for your life!" he yelled.

Weekes spun the wheel, and *Chi-Chi's* rudder screamed as it felt the water pressure. The engines shouted in chortling glee, and then, with an ominous crack, stopped dead. *Chi-Chi*, fortunately for herself had, however, sufficient way to take her clear of the spot where the blazing airship fell to the quenching water and fizzled out; while, overhead and undersea, the sister ships and the submarines which had accompanied her upon her "enterprise" scuttled home with the fear of Hell in their souls—the first because of the seaplanes which swarmed around them like a vengeful cloud of hornets; the second because of the unseen doom which had fallen, like a bolt from the blue, upon three of their number.

Frazer mopped his brow and laughed hysterically. Collins swore deeply because he was conscious of a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach.

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Then the searchlights dropped to the waters, and the craft commanded by the Chief Huntsman of the Pack that Hunt the Unterseeboote cruised across.

“ Well done, *Chi-Chi*,” he called. “ Your work to-night has vindicated your faith in your gadget, and if the Master of the U-Boat Hounds doesn’t withdraw his opinion to-morrow when he sees my report, I’m hanged if I won’t send in my resignation at the same time as you send in yours. You’ve been great, old man, great ! ”

“ Thanks,” said Roderick wearily. “ I knew what the gadget would do before I spoke about it even to you, and to-night it has proved itself. And when you make your report you can tell the M.U-B.H. that my address for a while will be the dockyard, if he wants to apologise. And, as my engine’s gone bust completely, you might shove across a rope and tow me home ; and if you’ll pass over that pink defect sheet, I’ll make some alterations and additions—I’ve now lost my drag and busted my motors.”

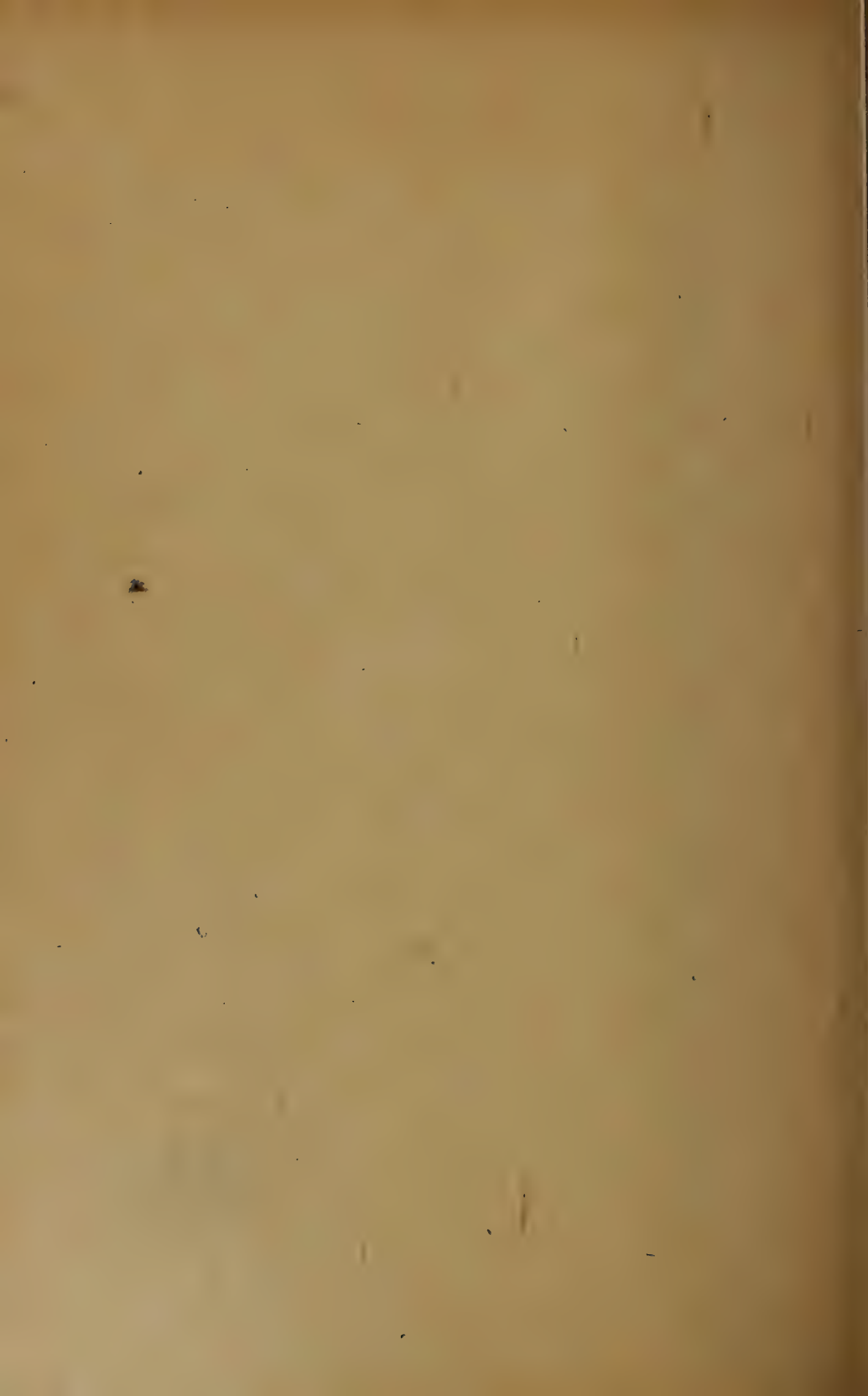
* * * * *

And, even in these days, whenever Fritz in the unterseeboote sees the Pack approaching his earth, he makes tracks across country at his best speed

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—knowing full well the reliance the hunters safely place in a gadget officially termed the Frazer Drag—but which the Hunters have affectionately re-christened “*Chi-Chi’s Own.*”

A FITTING FINALE



A FITTING FINALE

XIII

A FITTING FINALE

"FOR the first time in a long and adventurous career have I spent a week afloat on the blue waters of the Mediterranean," mused Temporary Lieutenant Roderick Frazer, R.N.V.R., commanding officer of His Majesty's Armed Motor Patrol Boat *Chi-Chi*, "and I'm inclined to think they are highly overrated both as regards beauty and the provision of facilities for excitement. I was given to understand that this sea was fairly stiff with U-boats, but I haven't dropped across even so much as the smell of one for seven clear days, and I'm beginning to get fed up."

The five other members of *Chi-Chi's* crew grinned slyly, and murmured their sympathy with their commanding officer. They, too, were getting rather bored through lack of work, and felt inclined to resent the decree issued by Those In Authority that they should, for a time, vacate their happy hunting-ground in the North Sea—where the U-boats were just beginning to have

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emphatic views regarding the efficiency and deadliness of the craft that, in the otiose days of peace, had won more races than any other motor boat afloat—and devote their attention utterly to clearing some of the underwater pests which made the passage through the Mediterranean exceedingly perilous for anything in the shape of commercial craft.

“ Things are certainly looking dull, sir,” agreed Petty Officer “ Jumper ” Collins, the only pukka Navy man among *Chi-Chi*’s crew, and the prime minister of that autocratic Vickers semi-automatic three-pounder which peered wickedly over the boat’s slim bows. “ It seems years since I fired a round, and if I don’t get some practice soon I’ll not be able to hit a haystack at ten yards, let alone a Fritz. I’ve read everything aboard—even the Prayer Book—I’ve smoked till my tongue is sore and my baccy pouch empty ; I’ve told all the stories I know and listened to everybody else’s yarns till I’m bored stiff ; and I’ve half a mind to write a letter and send it to the First Lord of the Admiralty by the next passing steamer, asking for a shift to a fighting ship. I’m fed, too—fed right up to the cap-ribbon.”

“ You are a little ray of sunshine, Collins, I

A FITTING FINALE

must say," returned Frazer. "Your speech is so light and mirthsome that it makes me want to throw you overboard. I'd rather——"

Able Seaman Weekes suddenly developed traces of insanity.

"Periscope off the port beam, sir," he yelled, with ecstasy, flinging his cap into the air. "Hooray for a spasm, anyway."

Collins leapt to his station at the sights of the three-pounder, and the breech of the weapon slid sweetly home on a full round. The engineer flung in his clutch; Frazer gripped the rim of his steering wheel with a feeling of gratitude towards this unterseeboote who had come to enliven his hours, and, as *Chi-Chi* slewed on her stern and slid ahead towards that elongated broomstick which Roderick recognised, by certain signs and tokens, as the periscope of an enemy, the crew fairly trembled with excitement at the prospect of adding still another Fritz to the number of submarines they had sunk since the war commenced.

Collins waited for no orders, but commenced to pump out a stream of projectiles at the three-inch wide target of the periscope. But his shooting was far from being up to standard; his

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missiles flew wide, and over, and short, and that broomstick continued steadily to lengthen out as though the three-pound shells were no more harmful than so many flies. Suddenly a black-and-white diapered conning-tower broke surface—a conning-tower which bore “ U III ” in staring symbols upon its sides—and as it broadened out into a light grey whaleback two hatches on that whaleback flew upwards and a pair of most efficient four-inch guns commenced to churn up the water all around *Chi-Chi* with their shells.

“ A spasm, without a doubt,” commented Frazer. “ A full-sized spasm, to boot. Smack it about, Jumper, or she’ll make us into a colander before long. Whew! That was a close one.”

One of the four-inch shells suddenly plumped into the sea just alongside *Chi-Chi*, and the resultant fountain completely swamped Lieutenant Frazer as it fell. His only cap went overboard and sailed merrily astern, but he took no notice beyond shaking himself like a water-soaked retriever. And after that *Chi-Chi* led the deuce of a life.

In vain she crammed on her top speed—the speed that usually made hay of all competition—and circled round the U-boat, trying to get into

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a position where one, at, least, of those deadly four-inchers could not bear upon its target. But the U-boat slewed also as she fired, and kept the pair in action the whole time.

Her shooting grew better too. One round dropped under the port set of picket boat dropping gear and cast overside that mechanism and the brand-new highly efficient fourteen-inch torpedo it held in leash.

"If you've chucked one tin-fish overboard," commented Roderick, "I'll make you a present of the other."

He turned *Chi-Chi* in her stride till her nose pointed towards her adversary; then he snicked over the firing lever of the starboard dropping gear, and the torpedo fell to the water with a splash. It shook itself once, and started off at an headlong forty knots for its target, but when it arrived the target wasn't there, having suddenly canted its helm and swung to port, well clear.

"It's up to you, Jumper," cried Frazer. "We've nothing now but your gun—the range is overlong for the Maxim to do any good."

"Leave it to me, sir," cried Collins, without removing his eye from the sight. "This is the

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finest test I've done for some time. Watch me knock that foremost gun out of time."

He was as good as his word. For the space of a minute he devoted the whole of his attention to the four-inch in front of the Boche's conning-tower, and at the end of that time—his shells having all arrived fair and square, and burst with marvellous precision—that four-inch suddenly retired from business with a wrecked mounting and a decimated crew.

"Hooray," cried Collins, leaping into the air with joy. "Now for the after gun."

He spoke too soon. The enemy, taking a leaf from his own book, suddenly slewed his weapon till it bore dead on *Chi-Chi's* three-pounder. That weapon utterly disappeared behind a burst of greeny-brown flame and smoke, and when the cloud cleared it was nowhere to be seen. Only the ragged steel edges of the mounting showed where it had once been.

"Hard luck, Collins," cried Roderick. "Are you hit?"

"Nary a scratch, sir," came the answer. "But I'd like to put my fingers on the chap who chewed up my gun. I'd die happy then—and so would he."

A FITTING FINALE

" Well, I hate to say it," retorted Frazer ;
" but I'm afraid that for the first time in her
adventurous life *Chi-Chi* will have to make a
quick getaway. Crouch low, everybody ; we'll
bid Brother Boche good-bye, and hope to drop
across him another day."

He nodded to the engineer, and that worthy
threw his regulating valve wide open. The Boche
chose that second for a burst of rapid fire, and
his shells fell thick as hail around the tiny craft's
motors. Again came that crowd of greeny flame
and brownish smoke ; again that ear-splitting
explosion and gout of flame, and this time *Chi-Chi*
slowed and stopped, her engines a mass of useless
scrap iron.

The German ceased fire and cruised over
towards his late adversary, one of his crew
waving a dirty white table cloth in token of a
truce.

" But you surrender, hein ? " demanded the
ober-leutnant, as he came within hailing distance.

" Surrender, be damned ! " retorted Frazer.
" We don't know what that word means, unless
it is when a Boche says it."

" Then I shall have no option but to batter
you to small pieces," came the cool reply.

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The ober-leutnant nodded to his gunlayer, and that worthy swung the muzzle of his weapon on to *Chi-Chi* once more. He was not more than two hundred yards distant, and at that range could have turned *Chi-Chi* into scrap metal and matchwood in less than a minute.

Collins, seeing the nod, interpreted it aright, and as the four-inch spoke for the first time and the dirty white flag was withdrawn, he leapt to where the brass-jacketed Maxim stood up astern, and, jamming in the firing lever, swept that treacherous U-boat's deck completely clear of living men.

"That for your dirty trick," he commented, as, the U-boat cruising out of range, he had perforce to cease firing. "Also that as a small instalment by way of revenge for your robbing me of my pet gun."

The U-boat, stopping once more, retorted by opening fire with her four-inch again, this time turning all her attention to disposing of the Maxim. It went at last, and *Chi-Chi's* final means of defence went with it. Then, once more, the Germans grew silent and cruised over to make prisoners of the intrepid six, now in parlous case.

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"For the second time I ask you to surrender," he said arrogantly, "and I do not think that you will answer me so rudely this time."

"Fritz," returned Lieutenant Frazer, solemnly, "if I wasn't sure that your soul would fry in Hades, I'd tell you to go there now. For the second time, permit me to say we don't know the meaning of the word surrender, and also may I remind you that, if you come any closer, we shall feel perfectly justified in using our automatic pistols upon your crew without further warning. You've caused enough mischief for one day, and some time or other I'll exact payment in full from you. Now slide off, and, if we've got to drown, for God's sake let us drown like gentlemen. Your presence pollutes the air—run away, we've got some prayers to say."

"And, to judge by the way your boat is sinking," retorted the unabashed Boche, "you'll have to say them quickly. Good-bye; it will be great news for Berlin to hear that the great *Chi-Chi*—the mighty hunter of submarines—has been sunk by one of our unterseeboten. I shall very likely receive the Iron Cross for this exploit. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Fritz," retorted Collins, bitterly.

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"And when you're wearing that Iron Cross may the ribbon choke you."

Very ostentatiously, lying all the while just outside pistol range, the U-boat commenced her preparations for submerging. The wrecked mounting of the foremost four-inch was lowered into its watertight chamber; the holes made in her hull-plating by Collins's now defunct three-pounder were carefully stopped; the after gun was stowed, and at last, having committed their dead to the deep, the Germans waved the sinking *Chi-Chi* a derisive farewell, and sank from sight beneath the waves.

"And there goes a dirty dog," remarked Collins, as the waters closed over the diapered conning-tower; "and may he forget what must be done when he wants to come to the top again."

"Amen," replied Frazer, and the other four of his crew echoed the petition.

Slowly, steadily, the once proud motor boat settled in the water. The sea gurgled in through holes under her well, and, though Collins stripped off his jumper and plugged the largest of these, it was plain that soon *Chi-Chi* must dive to her last long home. Then, after three hours of waiting—three hours of mortal agony—Frazer's

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sharp eyes discerned a cloud of smoke on the horizon, and, watching intently, at length made out the masts and funnel of a decent-sized cargo vessel, flying the Red Ensign.

He ordered his crew to fire their pistols in the hope of attracting her attention, and presently a hoist of coloured bunting appeared at her masthead. With hands that fumbled, Frazer drew from its locker the water-logged signal book of the international code, and at length deciphered the signalled message of comfort and good cheer.

"Stand by to jump lively," he told his men. "She'll stop and pick us up, chancing whether our pal the Boche is still hanging around. It'd be like him to let her pick us up and then torpedo her, just to pile on the agony a bit. Look out! here she comes."

The tramp steamer moved up at full speed, and ran sweetly alongside the water-logged *Chi-Chi*.

"Keep your eyes open, skipper," counselled Frazer; "there's a Fritz knocking about just round here."

The merchantman waved a hand at the muzzle of an efficient six-inch gun on his poop, trained ready to deal with any enemy who chose to

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appear. Roderick smiled, and motioned to his men to swarm up the ropes flung overside for them. They clambered to safety, leaving only the lieutenant and the petty officer behind.

"I say, skipper," suggested Frazer, "if you can spare a minute and your derrick, you might lift this hooker aboard for me—I'll willingly pay you double cargo freights if you'll get her home safely."

"No need for that, lad," said the kindly merchantman. "I've lost a ship or two myself, and know just how you're feeling. Stand by to hook her on; I'll shove the derrick overside."

Half an hour later the steamer gathered way once more, and on her boat deck lay the remains of what had once been a smart racing motor boat, but which was now nothing more than a big job for a dockyard. And still U III had not appeared to interfere with the work of mercy.

As soon as the steamer's screws commenced to revolve, however, that broomstick-like periscope once more appeared, and before she quite knew it, the conning-tower of U III broke surface off to starboard, and her remaining four-inch gun came into play once more. The first shot fell in front of the steamer's bows; the next

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ones were directed at the spot on her poop where the six-incher, with Collins at the sights, was raising a fair imitation of pandemonium as it spat forth shells as swiftly as they could be loaded.

The U-boat wasn't having it all her own way, and, deciding to submerge and revenge herself with a torpedo, suddenly closed her conning-tower, and, leaving her gun outside her hull, commenced to dive. Collins swore, pressed his trigger vengefully, and scored a bull. He knocked that four-inch clean overboard, and, what was still more to the point, he tore a huge slice from one of U-III's plates—a slice that could not be stopped up, and which, had the U-boat carried out her original intention of diving, would have ensured her going clean to the bottom of the sea and staying there for all time.

"Delivered into my hands," cried Collins. "Now I'll finish you, dirtiest of Boche dogs."

The six-inch dropped shells all around the after part of the half-submerged submarine, and at length one burst in a sheet of vivid flame. The U-boat quivered visibly and stopped dead, while her bows canted a little out of water as the sea rushed into her sternmost compartment through the hole caused by Collins's missiles.

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"Cease firing, Collins," cried Frazer. "You've done enough damage; if you do any more we shan't be able to tow her home, and I'd like to make a closer inspection of the hooker that knocked out *Chi-Chi*."

The merchant skipper touched his arm.

"Here comes another of 'em, sir," he said, pointing to port. Sure enough, above the surface rose a second black-and-white diapered conning-tower, identical with that of U III, except for a different number; and she, too, as soon as she got clear of the waters, opened fire.

Collins chuckled gleefully, and slewed the six-incher round to meet this new foe. He was mad with the blood lust of the fighting sailorman; also the six-incher was a beautiful weapon, almost brand new, and efficiently served by the steamer's crew. Once more began the duel between the guns, and Roderick looked on with as much glee as his gunlayer.

Suddenly, as his eye fell on the disabled U III he motioned to his own shipmates, also watching the fight.

"Load your pistols and lower the port life-boat," he ordered in a whisper. "We'll go and

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collect that Fritz in part payment for the damage he did to *Chi-Chi*."

The words were no sooner out of his mouth than the davit blocks commenced to cheep, and, choosing a moment when the steamer slowed preparatory to turning off her course, Frazer released the automatic disengaging gear, and dropped with her to the water. Four lusty pairs of arms pulled manfully at the oars; four half-berserk men glanced over their shoulders at the ever-lessening distance between themselves and the prize, and four minds resolved that they would show no quarter to anyone who tried to oppose them.

They drew within range of the U-boat, their first intimation of this fact coming with a revolver bullet fired by the U-boat's second in command. Frazer's men ceased pulling, and drew out their own service-pattern weapons, having an abnormal range and very heavy bullets. They replied to the fire, and the unter-officier, deeming discretion his present better part, withdrew to the cover afforded by his conning-tower. *Chi-Chi*'s men again bent to their oars, and this time reached the U-boat's side without any further attempt being made to stop their progress.

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“Board her, lads,” cried Frazer, setting the example. “Remember old *Chi-Chi*, and these blighters’ white flag trick. Shake ’em up, for the honour of the old tub and for your own sakes.”

And shake them up Frazer’s men did. Their automatics barked harshly in the fight that followed—in the battle between themselves and the Germans who poured up the conning-tower. Then, as the latter began to get shy and skulked below, the five dropped in to the U-boat’s interior, and carried on scrapping down there. This section of the fight was short and sharp. Frazer fired off all the rounds in his magazine, and, as he reloaded, a German bullet tore its way through the fleshy part of his shoulder. With a yell like that of a madman, Frazer leapt forward to close quarters, using his pistol butt with terrible effect upon every skull within reach.

The Germans, thoroughly cowed, sullenly flung down their weapons, and hoisted up their hands in token of surrender.

“Shove a rope’s end round ’em, lads,” cried Frazer, “and mount guard over the lot. I’m going up top to see how Jumper is getting on with the other hooker.”

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When Frazer reached the upper world again, silence reigned supreme. The other U-boat, deterred by the steamer's hot fire, had slid off on its unlawful occasions, leaving Collins half-crying with disappointment—a disappointment that changed to chagrin when he found that the rest of his shipmates had taken away a boat to capture U III.

But Frazer didn't mind the silence at all. The fact that the merchant skipper wasn't occupied with other matters made him all the more amenable to reason, and, calling Collins to his side, that officer requested the seaman to translate into intelligible English the letters formed by Lieutenant Frazer's waving arms.

"Please, will you come down alongside us and take off our prisoners—seventeen in number," read the seaman as Frazer semaphored the words. "Also, if you happen to possess a stout wire hawser, we should be glad for the loan thereof to enable us to attach this vessel to your stern for towing home to England."

"Well, he's rather a cool customer, your officer," remarked the merchantman when the signal ended. "Borrows my boat without so much as 'By your leave,' and then wants me to

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tow him and his prize home. I suppose I must, though, if it's only to repay you for beating off these two U-boat attacks in the last hour—I'm sure that if we hadn't possessed so skilful a gun-layer we'd have been out in the boats now, with the Boches spraying us with shrapnel. Tell him I'll drop down alongside and pass him my wire."

He did so, and ten minutes later, having received as passengers seventeen bound Huns and having transferred Collins to the company of his own comrades, he stood off once more on his interrupted journey homewards.

And bobbing at his stern, with her storage batteries working the pumps that kept out the water leaking through her damaged plates, bobbed U III, with a dilapidated White Ensign flaunting above the black-barred Eagle flag on her short wireless mast in token of her being in prize.

"And," remarked Petty Officer Collins, "I do think it was a dirty trick to slip off and leave me aboard that tramp, especially when you knew I wanted a yarn with the Boche that knocked my gun out of time, and that I was simply pining to damage my knuckles on some German face."

"Never mind, Jumper," quoth Temporary

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Lieutenant Roderick Frazer, "all's well that ends well. You beat back the other U-boat and so saved our pal the merchant skipper from being torpedoed, or we might all at the present moment have been suffering from damp shirts and a lack of fish. I thought the chance of capturing this U-boat—especially after the rudeness he'd displayed towards us—was too good to be missed; and, just by way of balm to your feelings, I'll promise you that when I purchase a new *Chi-Chi*—which I intend to do with my share of the prize money due for capturing *Seiner Deutschen Majestät's Unterseeboote* Number III, if the dockyards can't repair the old boat—I'll ask Those In Authority to send you to my ship as gunlayer-in-chief, and, for the rest of the duration of the war, we'll spend our days as we always have spent them—in seeing life and strafing Fritz!"

THE END

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